

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."—SHAKESPEARE.

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

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BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE WOMAN IN WHITE," &c.

CHAPTER III.

MAGDALEN'S first glance round the empty room, showed her the letter on the table. The address, as the doctor had predicted, broke the news the moment she looked at it.

Not a word escaped her. She sat down by the table, pale and silent, with the letter in her lap. Twice she attempted to open it, and twice she put it back again. The bygone time was not alone in her mind, as she looked at her sister's handwriting—the fear of Kirke was there with it. "My past life!" she thought. "What will he think of me, when he knows my past life?"

She made another effort, and broke the seal. A second letter dropped out of the enclosure, addressed to her in a handwriting with which she was not familiar. She put the second letter aside, and read the lines which Norah had written.

"Ventnor, Isle of Wight,
"August 24th.

"My dearest Magdalén,—When you read this letter, try to think we have only been parted since yesterday; and dismiss from your mind (as I have dismissed from mine) the past and all that belongs to it.

"I am strictly forbidden to agitate you, or to weary you by writing a long letter. Is it wrong to tell you that I am the happiest woman living? I hope not, for I can't keep the secret to myself.

"My darling, prepare yourself for the greatest surprise I have ever caused you. I am married. It is only a week to-day, since I parted with my old name—it is only a week, since I have been the happy wife of George Bartram, of St. Crux.

"There were difficulties, at first, in the way of our marriage; some of them, I am afraid, of my making. Happily for me, my husband knew, from the beginning, that I really loved him—he gave me a second chance of telling him so, after I had lost the first—and, as you see, I was wise enough to take it. You ought to be especially interested, my love, in this marriage; for you are the cause of it. If I had not gone to Aldborough to search for

the lost trace of you—if George had not been brought there, at the same time, by circumstances in which you were concerned—my husband and I might never have met. When we look back to our first impressions of each other, we look back to *you*.

"I must keep my promise not to weary you; I must bring this letter (sorely against my will) to an end. Patience! patience!—I shall see you soon. George and I are both coming to London to take you back with us to Ventnor. This is my husband's invitation, mind, as well as mine. Don't suppose I married him, Magdalén, until I had taught him to think of you as I think—to wish with my wishes, and to hope with my hopes. I could say so much more about this, so much more about George, if I might only give my thoughts and my pen their own way. But I must leave Miss Garth (at her own special request) a blank space to fill up on the last page of this letter; and I must only add one word more, before I say good-by—a word to warn you that I have another surprise in store, which I am keeping in reserve until we meet. Don't attempt to guess what it is. You might guess for ages, and be no nearer than you are now to a discovery of the truth.

"Your affectionate Sister,
"NORAH BARTRAM."

(ADDED BY MISS GARTH.)

"My dear Child,—If I had ever lost my old loving recollection of you, I should feel it in my heart again now, when I know that it has pleased God to restore you to us, from the brink of the grave. I add these lines to your sister's letter, because I am not sure that you are quite so fit yet, as she thinks you, to accept her proposal. She has not said a word of her husband, or herself, which is not true. But Mr. Bartram is a stranger to you—and if you think you can recover more easily and more pleasantly to yourself, under the wing of your old governess, than under the protection of your new brother-in-law, come to me first, and trust to my reconciling Norah to the change of plans. I have secured the refusal of a little cottage at Shanklin—near enough to your sister to allow of your seeing each other whenever you like, and far enough away, at the same time, to secure you the privilege, when you wish it, of being alone. Send me one line, before we meet, to say Yes or

No—and I will write to Shanklin by the next post.

"Always yours affectionately,

"HARRIET GARTH."

The letter dropped from Magdalen's hand. Thoughts which had never risen in her mind yet, rose in it now.

Norah, whose courage under undeserved calamity, had been the courage of resignation—Norah, who had patiently accepted her hard lot; who, from first to last, had meditated no vengeance, and stooped to no deceit—Norah had reached the end which all her sister's ingenuity, all her sister's resolution, and all her sister's daring, had failed to achieve. Openly and honourably, with love on one side and love on the other, Norah had married the man who possessed the Combe-Raven money—and Magdalen's own scheme to recover it had opened the way to the event which had brought husband and wife together!

As the light of that overwhelming discovery broke on her mind, the old strife was renewed; and Good and Evil struggled once more which should win her—but with added forces this time; with the new spirit that had been breathed into her new life; with the nobler sense that had grown with the growth of her gratitude to the man who had saved her, fighting on the better side. All the higher impulses of her nature, which had never, from first to last, let her err with impunity—which had tortured her, before her marriage and after it, with the remorse that no woman inherently heartless and inherently wicked can feel—all the nobler elements in her character gathered their forces for the crowning struggle, and strengthened her to meet, with no unworthy shrinking, the revelation that had opened on her view. Clearer and clearer, in the light of its own immortal life, the truth rose before her from the ashes of her dead passions, from the grave of her buried hopes. When she looked at the letter again—when she read the words once more, which told her that the recovery of the lost fortune was her sister's triumph, not hers—she had victoriously trampled down all little jealousies and all mean regrets; she could say in her heart of hearts, "Norah has deserved it!"

The day wore on. She sat absorbed in her own thoughts, and heedless of the second letter which she had not opened yet, until Kirke's return.

He stopped on the landing outside, and, opening the door a little way only, asked, without entering the room, if she wanted anything that he could send her. She begged him to come in. His face was worn and weary; he looked older than she had seen him look yet. "Did you put my letter on the table for me?" she asked.

"Yes. I put it there at the doctor's request."

"I suppose the doctor told you it was from my sister? She is coming to see me, and Miss Garth is coming to see me. They will thank you for all your goodness to me, better than I can."

"I have no claim on their thanks," he answered, sternly. "What I have done, was not done for them, but for you." He waited a little, and looked at her. His face would have betrayed him, in that look; his voice would have betrayed him, in the next words he spoke—if she had not guessed the truth already. "When your friends come here," he resumed, "they will take you away, I suppose, to some better place than this?"

"They can take me to no place," she said, gently, "which I shall think of as I think of the place where you found me. They can take me to no dearer friend than the friend who has saved my life."

There was a moment's silence between them.

"We have been very happy here," he went on, in lower and lower tones. "You won't forget me, when we have said good-by?"

She turned pale, as the words passed his lips; and, leaving her chair, knelt down at the table, so as to look up into his face, and to force him to look into hers.

"Why do you talk of it?" she asked. "We are not going to say good-by—at least, not yet."

"I thought—" he began.

"Yes?"

"I thought your friends were coming here—"

She eagerly interrupted him. "Do you think I would go away with anybody," she said, "even with the dearest relation I have in the world—and leave you here, not knowing and not caring whether I ever saw you again? Oh, you don't think that of me!" she exclaimed, with the passionate tears springing into her eyes—"I'm sure you don't think that of me!"

"No," he said; "I never have thought, I never can think, unjustly or unworthily of you."

Before he could add another word, she left the table as suddenly as she had approached it, and returned to her chair. He had unconsciously replied in terms that reminded her of the hard necessity which still remained unfulfilled—the necessity of telling him the story of the past. Not an idea of concealing that story from his knowledge crossed her mind. "Will he love me, when he knows the truth, as he loves me now?" That was her only thought, as she tried to approach the subject in his presence without shrinking from it.

"Let us put my own feelings out of the question," she said. "There is a reason for my not going away, unless I first have the assurance of seeing you again. You have a claim—the strongest claim of any one—to know how I came here, unknown to my friends, and how it was that you found me fallen so low."

"I make no claim," he said, hastily. "I wish to know nothing which it distresses you to tell me."

"You have always done your duty," she rejoined, with a faint smile. "Let me take example from you, if I can, and try to do mine."

"I am old enough to be your father," he said, bitterly. "Duty is more easily done at my age than it is at yours."

His age was so constantly in his mind now, that he fancied it must be in her mind too. She had never given it a thought. The reference he had just made to it, did not divert her for a moment from the subject on which she was speaking to him.

"You don't know how I value your good opinion of me," she said, struggling resolutely to sustain her sinking courage. "How can I deserve your kindness, how can I feel that I am worthy of your regard, until I have opened my heart to you? Oh, don't encourage me in my own miserable weakness! Help me to tell the truth—*force* me to tell it, for my own sake, if not for your!"

He was deeply moved by the fervent sincerity of that appeal.

"You *shall* tell it," he said. "You are right—and I was wrong." He waited a little, and considered. "Would it be easier to you," he asked, with delicate consideration for her, "to write it than to tell it?"

She caught eagerly at the suggestion. "Far easier," she replied. "I can be sure of myself—I can be sure of hiding nothing from you, if I write it. Don't write to me, on your side," she added suddenly, seeing, with a woman's instinctive quickness of penetration, the danger of totally renouncing her personal influence over him. "Wait till we meet; and tell me with your own lips, what you think."

"Where shall I tell it?"

"Here," she said, eagerly. "Here, where you found me helpless—here, where you have brought me back to life, and where I have first learnt to know you. I can bear the hardest words you say to me, if you will only say them in this room. It is impossible I can be away longer than a month; a month will be enough, and more than enough. If I come back—?" She stopped confusedly. "I am thinking of myself," she said, "when I ought to be thinking of you. You have your own occupations, and your own friends. Will you decide for us? Will you say how it shall be?"

"It shall be as you wish. If you come back in a month, you will find me here."

"Will it cause you no sacrifice of your own comfort, and your own plans?"

"It will cause me nothing," he replied, "but a journey back to the City." He rose and took his hat. "I must go there at once," he added, "or I shall not be in time."

"It is a promise between us?" she said—and held out her hand.

"Yes," he answered, a little sadly. "It is a promise."

Slight as it was, the shade of melancholy in his manner pained her. Forgetting all other anxieties in the anxiety to cheer him, she gently pressed the hand he gave her. "If *that* won't tell him the truth," she thought, "nothing will."

It failed to tell him the truth—but it forced a question on his mind which he had not ventured to ask himself before. "Is it her gratitude or her love that is speaking to me?" he wondered. "If I was only a younger man, I

might almost hope it was her love." That terrible sum in subtraction, which had first presented itself on the day when she told him her age, began to trouble him again, as he left the house. He took twenty from forty-one, at intervals, all the way back to the shipowners' office in Cornhill.

Left by herself, Magdalen approached the table, to write the line of answer which Miss Garth requested, and gratefully to accept the proposal that had been made to her.

The second letter, which she had laid aside and forgotten, was the first object that caught her eye, on changing her place. She opened it immediately, and not recognising the handwriting, looked at the signature. To her unutterable astonishment, her correspondent proved to be no less a person than—old Mr. Clare!

The philosopher's letter dispensed with all the ordinary forms of address, and entered on its subject without prefatory phrases of any kind, in these uncompromising terms:—

"I have more news for you of that contemptible cur, my son. Here it is in the fewest possible words.

"I always told you, if you remember, that Frank was a *Sneak*. The very first trace recovered of him, after his running away from his employers in China, presents him in that character. Where do you think he turns up next? He turns up, hidden behind a couple of flour barrels, on board an English vessel bound homeward from Hong-Kong to London.

"The name of the ship was *The Deliverance*; and the commander was one Captain Kirke. Instead of acting like a sensible man, and throwing Frank overboard, Captain Kirke was fool enough to listen to his story. He made the most of his misfortunes, you may be sure—he was half starved; he was an Englishman lost in a strange country, without a friend to help him; his only chance of getting home was to sneak into the hold of an English vessel—and he had sneaked in, accordingly, at Hong-Kong, two days since. That was his story. Any other lout in Frank's situation, would have been rope's-ended by any other captain. Deserving no pity from anybody—Frank was, as a matter of course, coddled and compassionated on the spot. The captain took him by the hand, the crew pitied him, and the passengers patted him on the back. He was fed, clothed, and presented with his passage home. Luck enough, so far, you will say. Nothing of the sort; nothing like luck enough for my despicable son."

"The ship touched at the Cape of Good Hope. Among his other acts of folly, Captain Kirke took a woman-passenger on board, at that place—not a young woman, by any means—the elderly widow of a rich colonist. Is it necessary to say that she forthwith became deeply interested in Frank and his misfortunes? Is it necessary to tell you what followed? Look back at my son's career; and you will see that what followed was all of a piece with what went before. He didn't deserve your poor father's

interest in him—and he got it. He didn't deserve your attachment—and he got it. He didn't deserve the best place in one of the best offices in London; he didn't deserve an equally good chance in one of the best mercantile houses in China; he didn't deserve food, clothing, pity, and a free passage home—and he got them all. Last, not least, he didn't even deserve to marry a woman old enough to be his grandmother—and he has done it! Not five minutes since, I sent his wedding-cards out to the dust-hole, and tossed the letter that came with them into the fire. The last piece of information which that letter contains, is that he and his wife are looking out for a house and estate to suit them. Mark my words! Frank will get one of the best estates in England; a seat in the House of Commons will follow as a matter of course; and one of the legislators of this Ass-ridden country will be—*My Lout!*

"If you are the sensible girl I have always taken you for, you have long since learned to rate Frank at his true value, and the news I send you will only confirm your contempt for him. I wish your poor father could but have lived to see this day! Often as I have missed my old gossip, I don't know that I ever felt the loss of him so keenly, as I felt it when Frank's wedding-cards and Frank's letter came to this house.

"Your friend, if you ever want one,

"FRANCIS CLARE, Sen^r."

With one momentary disturbance of her composure, produced by the appearance of Kirke's name in Mr. Clare's singular narrative, Magdalen read the letter steadily through, from beginning to end. The time when it could have distressed her, was gone by; the scales had long since fallen from her eyes. Mr. Clare himself would have been satisfied, if he had seen the quiet contempt on her face as she laid aside his letter. The only serious thought it cost her, was a thought in which Kirke was concerned. The careless manner in which he had referred, in her presence, to the passengers on board his ship, without mentioning any of them by their names, showed her that Frank must have kept silence on the subject of the engagement once existing between them. The confession of that vanished delusion was left for her to make—as part of the story of the past which she had pledged herself unreservedly to reveal.

She wrote to Miss Garth, and sent the letter to the post immediately.

The next morning brought a line of rejoinder. Miss Garth had written to secure the cottage at Shanklin, and Mr. Merrick had consented to Magdalen's removal on the following day. Norah would be the first to arrive at the house; and Miss Garth would follow, with a comfortable carriage to take the invalid to the railway. Every needful arrangement had been made for her: the effort of moving was the one effort she would have to make.

Magdalen read the letter thankfully—but her thoughts wandered from it, and followed Kirke on his return to the City. What was the business which had once already taken him there in

the morning? And why had the promise exchanged between them, obliged him to go to the City again, for the second time in one day?

Was it by any chance, business relating to the sea? Were his employers tempting him to go back to his ship?

CHAPTER IV.

THE first agitation of the meeting between the sisters was over; the first vivid impressions, half pleasurable, half painful, had softened a little—and Norah and Magdalen sat together, hand in hand; each rapt in the silent fulness of her own joy.

Magdalen was the first to speak.

"You have something to tell me, Norah?"

"I have a thousand things to tell you, my love; and you have ten thousand things to tell me.—Do you mean that second surprise, which I told you of in my letter?"

"Yes. I suppose it must concern me very nearly—or you would hardly have thought of mentioning it in your first letter?"

"It does concern you very nearly. You have heard of George's house in Essex? You must be familiar, at least, with the name of St. Crux?—What is there to start at, my dear? I am afraid you are hardly strong enough for any more surprises just yet?"

"Quite strong enough, Norah. I have something to say to you about St. Crux—I have a surprise, on my side, for you."

"Will you tell it me now?"

"Not now. You shall know it when we are at the sea-side—you shall know it, before I accept the kindness which has invited me to your husband's house."

"What can it be? Why not tell me at once?"

"You used often to set me the example of patience, Norah, in old times—will you set me the example now?"

"With all my heart. Shall I return to my own story as well? Yes? Then we will go back to it at once. I was telling you that St. Crux is George's house, in Essex; the house he inherited from his uncle. Knowing that Miss Garth had a curiosity to see the place, he left word (when he went abroad after the admiral's death) that she and any friends who came with her, were to be admitted, if she happened to find herself in the neighbourhood during his absence. Miss Garth and I, and a large party of Mr. Tyrrel's friends, found ourselves in the neighbourhood, not long after George's departure. We had all been invited to see the launch of Mr. Tyrrel's new yacht, from the builder's yard at Wivenhoe, in Essex. When the launch was over, the rest of the company returned to Colchester to dine. Miss Garth and I contrived to get into the same carriage together, with nobody but my two little pupils for our companions. We gave the coachman his orders, and drove round by St. Crux. We were let in the moment Miss Garth mentioned her name; and were shown all over the house. I don't know how to describe it to you: it is the most bewildering place I ever saw in my life—"

"Don't attempt to describe it, Norah. Go on with your story instead."

"Very well. My story takes me straight into one of the rooms at St. Crux—a room about as long as your street here; so dreary, so dirty, and so dreadfully cold, that I shiver at the bare recollection of it. Miss Garth was for getting out of it again, as speedily as possible, and so was I. But the housekeeper declined to let us off, without first looking at a singular piece of furniture, the only piece of furniture in the comfortless place. She called it a tripod, I think. (There is nothing to be alarmed at, Magdalen; I assure you there is nothing to be alarmed at!) At any rate, it was a strange three-legged thing, which supported a great pan full of charcoal ashes at the top. It was considered by all good judges (the housekeeper told us) a wonderful piece of chasing in metal; and she especially pointed out the beauty of some scroll-work running round the inside of the pan, with Latin mottoes on it, signifying—I forgot what. I felt not the slightest interest in the thing myself, but I looked close at the scroll-work to satisfy the housekeeper. To confess the truth, she was rather tiresome with her mechanically-learnt lecture on fine metal-work—and, while she was talking, I found myself idly stirring the soft, feathery white ashes backwards and forwards with my hand, pretending to listen, with my mind a hundred miles away from her. I don't know how long or how short a time I had been playing with the ashes, when my finger suddenly encountered a piece of crumpled paper, hidden deep among them. When I brought it to the surface it proved to be a letter—a long letter full of cramped, close writing.—You have anticipated my story, Magdalen, before I can end it! You know as well as I do, that the letter which my idle fingers found, was the Secret Trust. Hold out your hand, my dear. I have got George's permission to show it to you—and there it is!"

She put the Trust into her sister's hand. Magdalen took it from her mechanically. "You!" she said, looking at her sister with the remembrance of all that she had vainly ventured, of all that she had vainly suffered at St. Crux.

"*You* have found it!"

"Yes," said Norah, gaily. "The Trust has proved no exception to the general perversity of all lost things. Look for them, and they remain invisible. Leave them alone, and they reveal themselves! You and your lawyer, Magdalen, were both justified in supposing that your interest in this discovery was an interest of no common kind. I spare you all our consultations after I had produced the crumpled paper from the ashes. It ended in George's lawyer being written to, and in George himself being recalled from the Continent. Miss Garth and I both saw him immediately on his return; and he did, what neither of us could do—he solved the mystery of the Trust being hidden in the charcoal ashes. Admiral Bartram, you must know, was all his life subject to fits of somnambulism. He had been found walking in his

sleep, not long before his death—just at the time, too, when he was sadly troubled in his mind on the subject of that very letter in your hand. George's idea is that he must have fancied he was doing, in his sleep, what he would have done rather than do in his waking moments—destroying the Trust. The fire had been lit in the pan not long before, and he no doubt saw it still burning in his dream. This was George's explanation of the strange position of the letter when I discovered it. The question of what was to be done with the letter itself came next, and was no easy question for a woman to understand. But I determined to master it, and I did master it, because it related to you."

"Let me try to master it in my turn," said Magdalen. "I have a particular reason for wishing to know as much about this letter, as you know yourself. What has it done for others? and what is it to do for me?"

"My dear Magdalen, how strangely you look at it! how strangely you talk of it! Worthless as it may appear, that morsel of paper gives you a fortune."

"Is my only claim to the fortune, the claim which this letter gives me?"

"Yes—the letter is your only claim. Shall I try if I can explain it, in two words? Taken by itself, the letter might, in the lawyer's opinion, have been made a matter of dispute—though I am sure George would have sanctioned no proceeding of that sort. Taken, however, with the postscript which Admiral Bartram attached to it (you will see the lines, if you look under the signature on the third page), it becomes legally binding, as well as morally binding, on the admiral's representatives. I have exhausted my small stock of legal words, and must go on in my own language, instead of in the lawyer's. The end of the thing was simply this. All the money went back to Mr. Noel Vanstone's estate (another legal word! my vocabulary is richer than I thought), for one plain reason—that it had not been employed as Mr. Noel Vanstone directed. If Mrs. Girdlestone had lived, or if George had married me a few months earlier, results would have been just the other way. As it is, half the money has been already divided between Mr. Noel Vanstone's next of kin; which means, translated into plain English, my husband, and his poor bedridden sister—who took the money formally, one day, to satisfy the lawyer, and who gave it back again generously, the next, to satisfy herself. So much for one half of the legacy. The other half, my dear, is all yours. How strangely events happen, Magdalen! It is only two years since you and I were left disinherited orphans—and we are sharing our poor father's fortune between us, after all!"

"Wait a little, Norah. Our shares come to us in very different ways."

"Do they? Mine comes to me, by my husband. Yours comes to you—" She stopped confusedly, and changed colour. "Forgive me, my own love!" she said, putting Magdalen's hand

to her lips. "I have forgotten what I ought to have remembered. I have thoughtlessly distressed you!"

"No!" said Magdalen. "You have encouraged me."

"Encouraged you?"

"You shall see."

With these words, she rose quietly from the sofa, and walked to the open window. Before Norah could follow her, she had torn the Trust to pieces, and had cast the fragments into the street.

She came back to the sofa, and laid her head with a deep sigh of relief on Norah's bosom. "I will owe nothing to my past life," she said. "I have parted with it, as I have parted with those torn morsels of paper. All the thoughts, and all the hopes belonging to it, are put away from me for ever!"

"Magdalen! my husband will never allow you—I will never allow you myself!"

"Hush! hush! What your husband thinks right, Norah, you and I will think right too. I will take from *you*, what I would never have taken, if that letter had given it to me. The end I dreamed of, has come. Nothing is changed but the position I once thought we might hold towards each other. Better as it is, my love—far, far better as it is."

So she made the last sacrifice of the old perversity, and the old pride. So she entered on the new and the nobler life.

* * * * *

A month had passed. The autumn sunshine was bright, even in the murky streets; and the clocks in the neighbourhood were just striking two, as Magdalen returned alone to the house in Aaron's Buildings.

"Is he waiting for me?" she asked, anxiously, when the landlady let her in.

He was waiting in the front room. Magdalen stole up the stairs, and knocked at the door. He called to her carelessly and absently to come in—plainly thinking that it was only the servant who applied for permission to enter the room.

"You hardly expected me so soon?" she said, speaking on the threshold, and pausing there, to enjoy his surprise, as he started to his feet and looked at her.

The only traces of illness still visible in her face, left a delicacy in its outline which added refinement to her beauty. She was simply dressed in muslin. Her plain straw bonnet had no other ornament than the white ribbon with which it was sparingly trimmed. She had never looked lovelier in her best days, than she looked now—as she advanced to the table at which he had been sitting, with a little basket of flowers that she had brought with her from the country, and offered him her hand.

He looked anxious and careworn, when she saw him closer. She interrupted his first inquiries and congratulations, to ask if he had remained in London, since they had parted—if he had not even gone away for a few days only, to see his friends in Suffolk? No: he had been

in London, ever since. He never told her that the pretty parsonage-house in Suffolk wanted all those associations with herself, in which the poor four walls at Aaron's Buildings were so rich. He only said, he had been in London ever since.

"I wonder," she asked, looking him attentively in the face, "if you are as happy to see me again, as I am to see you?"

"Perhaps I am even happier, in my different way," he answered, with a smile.

She took off her bonnet and scarf, and seated herself once more in her own arm-chair. "I suppose the street is very ugly," she said; "and I am sure nobody can deny that the house is very small. And yet—and yet, it feels like coming home again. Sit there, where you used to sit, and tell me about yourself—I want to know all that you have done, all that you have thought even, while I have been away." She tried to resume the endless succession of questions by means of which she was accustomed to lure him into speaking of himself. But she put them far less spontaneously, far less adroitly than usual. Her one all-absorbing anxiety in entering that room, was not an anxiety to be trifled with. After a quarter of an hour wasted in constrained inquiries on one side, in reluctant replies on the other, she ventured near the dangerous subject at last.

"Have you received the letters I wrote to you from the sea-side?" she asked, suddenly, looking away from him for the first time.

"Yes," he said, "all."

"Have you read them?"

"Every one of them; many times over."

Her heart beat as if it would suffocate her. She had kept her promise bravely. The whole story of her life, from the time of the home-wreck at Combe-Raven, to the time when she had destroyed the Secret Trust in her sister's presence, had been all laid before him. Nothing that she had done, nothing even that she had thought, had been concealed from his knowledge. As he would have kept a pledged engagement with her, so she had kept her pledged engagement with him. She had not faltered in the resolution to do this—and now she faltered over the one decisive question which she had come there to ask. Strong as the desire in her was to know if she had lost or won him, the fear of knowing was, at that moment, stronger still. She waited, and trembled: she waited, and said no more.

"May I speak to you about your letters?" he asked. "May I tell you—?"

If she had looked at him, as he said those few words, she would have seen what he thought of her, in his face. She would have seen, innocent as he was in this world's knowledge, that he knew the priceless value, the all-ennobling virtue, of a woman who speaks the truth. But she had no courage to look at him—no courage to raise her eyes from her lap.

"Not just yet," she said, faintly. "Not quite so soon after we have met again."

She rose hurriedly from her chair, and walked

to the window—turned back again into the room—and approached the table, close to where he was sitting. The writing materials scattered near him offered her a pretext for changing the subject; and she seized on it directly. “Were you writing a letter?” she asked, “when I came in?”

“I was thinking about it,” he replied. “It was not a letter to be written, without thinking first.” He rose, as he answered her, to gather the writing materials together, and put them away.

“Why should I interrupt you?” she said. “Why not let me try whether I can’t help you instead. Is it a secret?”

“No—not a secret.”

He hesitated, as he answered her. She instantly guessed the truth.

“Is it about your ship?”

He little knew how she had been thinking in her absence from him, of the business which he believed that he had concealed from her. He little knew that she had learnt already to be jealous of his ship.

“Do they want you to return to your old life?” she went on. “Do they want you to go back to the sea? Must you say Yes or No at once?”

“At once.”

“If I had not come in when I did, would you have said Yes?”

She unconsciously laid her hand on his arm; forgetting all inferior considerations in her breathless anxiety to hear his next words. The confession of his love was within a hair’s-breadth of escaping him—but he checked the utterance of it even yet. “I don’t care for myself,” he thought. “But how can I be certain of not distressing her?”

“Would you have said, Yes?” she repeated.

“I was doubting,” he answered—“I was doubting between Yes and No.”

Her hand tightened on his arm; a sudden trembling seized her in every limb—she could bear it no longer. All her heart went out to him, in her next words.

“Were you doubting *for my sake*?”

“Yes,” he said. “Take my confession in return for yours—I was doubting *for your sake*.”

She said no more—she only looked at him. In that look, the truth reached him at last. The next instant, she was folded in his arms, and was shedding delicious tears of joy, with her face hidden on his bosom.

“Do I deserve my happiness?” she murmured, asking the one question at last. “Oh, I know how the poor narrow people who have never felt and never suffered, would answer me, if I asked them what I ask you. If they knew my story, they would forget all the provocation, and only remember the offence—they would fasten on my sin, and pass all my suffering by. But you are not one of them? Tell me if you have any shadow of a misgiving! Tell me if you doubt that the one dear object of all my life to come is to live worthy of you! I asked you to wait

and see me: I asked you if there was any hard truth to be told, to tell it me here, with your own lips. Tell it, my love, my husband!—tell it me now!”

She looked up, still clinging to him, as she clung to the hope of her better life to come.

“Tell me the truth!” she repeated.

“With my own lips?”

“Yes!” she answered, eagerly. “Say what you think of me, with your own lips.”

He stooped, and kissed her.

THE END.

LINKS IN THE CHAIN.

THERE is something in the progress of successive ages, very analogous to the links of a chain. Occasionally we come in contact with an individual still living, and are startled to find ourselves in the presence of an extinct age. When Thomas Moore met old Mrs. Fiozzi, two years before her death in 1821, he appeared to be brought eye to eye with the great spirits of the eighteenth century. “Faces of other times,” he writes in his Diary, “seemed to crowd over her as she sat—the Johnsons, Reynolds, &c.” But the venerable lady may be regarded as a link between this very day and the days of Hogarth; for the illustrious painter of social life in the reigns of the first and second Georges, introduced her portrait, when she was fourteen years of age, into one of his pictures; and in some of her later letters she alludes (in no very complimentary terms, for she was the highest of High Tories) to the noble lord who at this moment occupies the post of Foreign Secretary. She was born before the death of Pope, yet she lived to read the poetry of Byron and Moore. She was fifty years of age at the time of the French Revolution; yet she saw the introduction of gas-lamps and steam-boats. Had she survived eight or nine years longer, she might have ridden in an omnibus, and might have been helped across the road by a policeman. Yet she was eight years younger than Mrs. Garrick, who was married to the famous actor as far back as 1749, and survived him forty-three years: nor did she die until 1822, when, sitting in her arm-chair, she was quietly withdrawn from mortal existence at the age of ninety-eight.

One of the most remarkable connecting links between the present and the past, was Samuel Rogers, who lived until the close of 1855, yet who once went with a young literary friend to the house of Dr. Johnson in Bolt-court, with a view to consult him about their writings. They were at the very door, when terror took possession of their souls, and they fled from the tremendous deity within. Rogers, however, must often have seen the Leviathan rolling about among the human billows of Fleet-street; and he shook hands, when he was a youth, with the Doctor’s special horror, Jack Wilkes. Walter Savage Landor, who was nine years old when Johnson died in 1784, is still spared to us.

Had he ever seen the great dictator of letters, he would probably recollect him. The time has not long gone by, when it was no uncommon thing to meet with men who could speak of Johnson from personal remembrance; yet Johnson had been touched for the king's evil by Queen Anne. The writer has known two men, one of whom had conversed with the lexicographer, while the other had only seen him in the streets. The former, at the time of the interview, was a studious youth, preparing himself for a literary career, in which he afterwards acquired some name. He had gone into a bookseller's shop to inquire for some classical author, and found Johnson sitting there. The latter, seeing the young man poring over a Greek or Latin book, asked to look at it, questioned him about his studies, and received such satisfactory answers that he returned the volume with the impressive sentence, uttered in his most dignified, and yet blandest, manner: "You may go on, sir; you may go on." The youth thus magnificently ordained, as it were, *ex cathedra*, was James Boaden, subsequently author of a Life of John Kemble, and of a novel which attracted attention, called *The Man of Two Lives*. He survived until 1839, and prolonged to that late period something of the Johnsonian manner, though softened with greater amiability. His deportment and mode of delivery were at once formal and suave. He was fond of the Johnsonian "sir;" and his respectful politeness in addressing ladies was altogether that of the old school. Like Johnson, Boaden loved nothing better than to "fold his legs and have his talk out;" and, being a man of large reading and cultivated mind, his conversation was well worth listening to.

Boaden reminds one of the Kembles, of whom he was a devoted friend; and they suggest another curious link with a bygone age. Thomas Warton, in some prefatory observations to his edition of *Comus*, speaks of Mrs. Siddons. So, we have that actress directly associated with the men who gathered about Johnson; yet the brother of Mrs. Siddons—Charles Kemble—did not finally leave the stage until 1840, though he made his first appearance in London in 1794.

It does not always require extraordinary longevity to connect a man with two distinct epochs; but where any one has lived far beyond the natural term of human existence, the interlinking is, of course, all the more remarkable. That wonderful old man, Henry Jenkins, died on the 6th of December, 1670, at the prodigious, but doubtful, age of one hundred and sixty-nine. If he were born in the reign of Henry the Seventh, he must have died in the reign of Charles the Second. His youth was passed in days when the world was yet unshaken by the thunders of Luther and his fellow-reformers; yet he may have lived to find Protestantism an old-established institution. He saw the rise of the Church of England under Henry the Eighth, its temporary extinction in an ocean of blood during the reign of Mary, its re-establishment under Elizabeth, its steady progress under

James, its explosion into jarring schisms and sects in the stormy days of Charles the First, its destruction under the Commonwealth, its restoration with the restored monarchy. He could speak, in the early years of Charles the Second's reign, of the times when poor Englishmen were relieved at convent-doors by abbots. When first he drew breath, the discovery of the New World was still the newest wonder in men's mouths; and before he drew his latest breath, the Pilgrim Fathers had for some years planted another England beyond the waves of the Atlantic. He beheld the whole progress of Puritanism, from its infancy as a persecuted sect, to the days of its brief ascendancy, and of its subsequent fall to the level of barely tolerated dissent. According to tradition, he lived for more than a hundred years before the union of the crowns of England and Scotland, and could tell stories of the battle of Flodden Field, "where the Scots were beat, with the death of their king;" yet he endured for nearly seventy years after the fusion. When he was a boy, arrows were still used in warfare; he escorted a horse-load of arrows from Flodden Field; but for years before his death, gunpowder had blasted arrows into disuse and oblivion. He was between thirty and forty when the monasteries were dissolved; yet, in his distant Yorkshire home, he must have heard of the Great Fire of London.

Little more than two years ago, our young Prince of Wales shook hands with a man who had stood in the rebel ranks against his (the prince's) great-grandfather; a man who had been born a colonial subject of England, and who had lived for eighty years as a citizen of the republic he had helped to establish. The old hero died a few months later, but remained long enough in this world to witness the commencement of the dissolution of his nation. It must have seemed to the prince as if he were contemplating a piece of history done in flesh and blood. To a Frenchman there must be something equally interesting in the annual gathering on the emperor's fête-day, of the remnant of the original Imperial Guard; a handful of war-worn veterans, scarred even as their flags are tattered by the hurricane of battles that have long been history; a feeble company, dwindling year by year, and annually recording their own mortality in their closer ranks. It is sad to think of the days (now not far distant) when that impressive troop will sink to six—to three—to one. What will that one man do when he represents the redoubtable Guard? Will he appear as usual in the old costume on the 15th of August, and parody that tragic epigram of the sole survivor of a French regiment sent on some desperate service, who, returning to his commanding officer, reported himself in these words: "I am the regiment"? Will that Last Man of the Napoleonic military world, drink to his ghostly comrades on the other side of death, as the last of the crew of roysterers in the German ballad drank to his—"and never again drank he"? Or, when all the feasting is over in that gay Paris which must be so strange and new to him—when

the last illumination lamp is extinguished, and the last gas eagle flares coarsely in the white air of dawn—will he go home to his lodging, and quietly give up his spirit in a fume of charcoal, unable to bear another solitary 15th?

The Bonaparte period, however, is still sufficiently near, to leave us several remaining links with it. An English Field-Marshal yet lives who entered the army two years before the dominion of Robespierre in France; the commission of Lord Combermere dating from 1791. The Peninsular and Oriental Company have on board one of their vessels, a man who fought under Nelson at Copenhagen and Trafalgar. He was only a boy at that time; but I have known a person (not very long dead) who was an able-bodied sailor at the battle of the Nile, which was fought in 1798. As a man, he had seen L'Orient blow up, and the Danish capital surrender; had sailed with "Tommy Trowbridge;" and might, as far as his age went, have been concerned in the Mutiny at the Nore. He was still a vigorous old fellow in 1855, and wanted to join the fleet under Lyons, and have a turn at the Russians. Mr. T. P. Cooke, who still lives a prosperous gentleman, served under Nelson, in His Majesty's ship *Raven*, at the battle of St. Vincent's.

We all know the story of Richard Cromwell, who, visiting the House of Lords in 1705, and being asked by some one, who did not know who he was, if he had ever seen or heard the like, replied, "Never, since I sat in that chair," pointing to the throne. What a dramatic bringing together of two totally distinct eras! The Commonwealth and the reign of Anne—grim iron-clad Puritanism, and the silken world of fops and belles—the literature of Milton, and that of Addison—all meeting for a moment within the circle of one little speech! Richard Cromwell did not die until 1712, and might have read of Sir Roger de Coverley in the pages of the *Spectator* on the days of their publication.

Sometimes we hear of stories in this wise that exceed belief, or which at any rate are so improbable as to warrant scepticism. Of this character is a relation recently published in an American paper, to the effect that the writer, fifty years ago, was told by a very old lady residing in the neighbourhood of Stratford-on-Avon, that she had heard from her grandmother certain particulars of the funeral of Shakespeare; to wit, that the clergyman who preached the funeral sermon avowed his opinion that no man since the days of the Apostle Paul had possessed so profound an acquaintance with human nature; and that the clergyman then concluded with the very questionable aspiration, "Would to God he had been a divine!" Now, fifty years ago Shakespeare had been dead close upon two centuries; and it is not very probable that at that time even a very old lady would have been able to recollect another very old lady who could speak from personal knowledge of a circumstance which happened in 1616. Yet there is another story which, though sounding even more wonderful, may be correct. In the year 1851, the following extraordinary state-

ment was made in an English journal: "I have an aunt, now eighty-nine years of age, who in early life knew one who was in the habit of saying, 'I knew a man who knew a man who knew a man who danced at court in the days of Richard the Third.' Thus there have been but three links between one who knew Richard the Third, and one now living. My aunt's acquaintance (a Mr. Harrison) could name his three predecessors, who were members of his own family. Mr. Harrison further stated that there was nothing remarkable about Richard; that he was not the hunchback 'lump of foul deformity' generally believed until of late years." Startling as this narration may appear, it might be proved, as a mere matter of calculation, without any violence to probability. Let us say that the lady who was living in 1851, aged eighty-nine, received her information from A. when she was ten years of age: this must have been in 1772. We will suppose that A. knew B. eighty-two years before that period: this would carry us back to 1690. B. living at that time, also recollects as far back as eighty-two years. We are thus taken to the year 1608; at which time B. knew C. whose memory, again stretching back eighty-two years, lands us at 1526, when C. might easily have known a man who was at court in the time of Richard the Third; since forty-two years from the last-mentioned date will carry us straight into that reign—Richard having ascended the throne in 1483, and died in 1485. In this case the relation is such as might easily have been borne in mind by a mere child; but the lady who alleged that she was at Shakespeare's funeral must have been of mature years at the time, or she could not have recollected the heads of the sermon; and it is impossible to conceive how such a person could have had a granddaughter living in 1812.

A "MERCENARY" MARRIAGE.

SHE moves as light across the grass

As moves my shadow gaunt and tall;
And like my shadow, close yet free,
The thought of her aye follows me,
My little maid of Moreton Hall.

No matter how or where we loved,
Or when we'll wed, or what befall:
I only feel she's mine at last,
I only know I'll hold her fast,
Though to dust crumbles Moreton Hall.

Her pedigree—good sooth! 'tis long:
Her grim sires stare from every wall;
And centuries of ancestral grace
Shine in her gentle girlish face,
As meek she moves through Moreton Hall.

Whilst I have—nothing! save, perhaps,
Some worthless heaps of idle gold,
And a true heart, the which her eye
Through glittering dross spied, womanly;—
Therefore the neighbours think her "sold."

I laugh—she laughs—the hills and vales
Laugh, as we ride 'neath chestnuts tall,
Or start the deer that near us graze,
And look up, large-eyed, with soft gaze
At the fair maid of Moreton Hall.

For us—we know that earth is fair,
And life is sweet, and love is strong,
And two, close knit in mutual ties,
The whole world's wealth may well despise—
Its folly, madness, shame, and wrong.

We are not proud, with a fool's pride,—
Nor cowards, to be held in thrall
By pelf or lineage, face or lands;—
One honest heart, two honest hands,—
Are worth far more than Moreton Hall.
Therefore our strong love breaks like tow
The bars that weaker souls appal:
I take her hand and hold it fast,
Knowing she'll love me to the last—
My dearest maid of Moreton Hall!

HOW TO MAKE SOLDIERS.

ALTHOUGH I had not been in my native country, France, since I was five years old, the mayor of my parish in due time called at the conscription urn for Jules Meudon (which is my name), and as Jules was not forthcoming, and there was no proof of his death, his worship came to the conclusion that I was alive, aged twenty, and among those to be drawn for. Whereupon he did draw for me, and drew one of the worst numbers in the urn, whereby I was condemned to seven years' military service. Monsieur then intimated that, unless recruit Jules Meudon presented himself within six months after that date, he would be declared refractory, amenable to court-martial, and likely to get from six months to two years' imprisonment. But in the mean time, as the state required fifty soldiers out of every hundred men liable to the conscription, the quasi lucky holder of number fifty-one need not congratulate himself upon being exempt, for he would have to serve for the absentee, Jules Meudon.

The government issues every year a decree calling out so many men—say twenty thousand. The mayors throughout France immediately send in their account of the names of the young men who will attain the age of one-and-twenty when the draught is required. Lots are always drawn several months, sometimes a whole year, before the men are enrolled. Supposing the state to require twenty thousand soldiers, if the returns show that there are forty thousand men of the necessary age, fifty out of every hundred will be called upon to serve.

The case is often hard for a poor widow who is supported solely by the labour of her children. Her eldest son, maybe, is a lazy vagabond who will not work: he is exempt from the conscription, as being the eldest son of a widow; but the second, who is an industrious youth, must draw. He draws a black number, and must serve. The poor widow remains then without bread. I know of several cases like this. I have heard from recruits, sad over-true tales about widows, crippled fathers, brothers and sisters, who have been reduced to starvation (and sometimes worse than that) by the departure of Louis, or Henri, or Charles.

As for me, an absentee recruit, having failed to present myself when I was one-and-twenty, I was declared refractory. But I had no permanent inducement to remain abroad, so I resolved to go home to my own country, and as a volunteer accept my destiny. I would plead an absence from France of eighteen years, and take my chance with the war minister. In England I thought I could not live upon eight pounds a month, so I went to France to enlist, where I should have to live upon twelve francs ninety centimes. I sold my wardrobe, took with me a small hand-trunk, and departed.

On my arrival in Paris, my English education suggested to me that I had best at once inquire for the address of a good lawyer, so that I might learn exactly how I stood with regard to the authorities, and be able to defend myself if necessary. A gentleman of that profession defined my position very precisely, said I was a refractory recruit from unavoidable circumstances, and that I had nothing to fear save and except the procureur-impérial, or public prosecutor.

The books said that the act of accusation, the hearing of witnesses, their confrontation with the accused, and the passing of the sentence, must be terminated within twice twenty-four hours after the arrest. I saw also with pleasure that clause thirty-four recommended, "That the mildest measures should prevail in the infliction of punishments, unless the severer ones obtained at least two votes above the former"—that is to say, that if the seven judges who would try me were to come "to the decision of inflicting on me the maximum penalty by a majority of one vote only, the president would be bound to sentence me to the minimum." And I was also glad to read that the court would be made to appreciate the importance of the functions they were about to discharge, by clause eighteen, which bids "officers appointed to sit on a court-martial, proceed in a body to hear the celebration of mass before trial." Knowing exactly what I had to expect, I went and gave myself up at the recruiting-office in the Rue Cherche Midi—an odd name, Seek Mid-day-street! From time immemorial the soldiers' prisons have been in this street; and as in French military prisons you only get one meal a day, and that at mid-day, you may be sure that this hour is anxiously looked for.

I found no difficulty in being admitted to the presence of the colonel, who is chief at the recruiting-office. A most accessible person, for good reasons. He desired me to be seated, and inquired the nature of my business. He was smiling and affable; but the moment I told him I was a refractory recruit, I distinctly saw his moustache bristle, his brow knit, and the pupil of his eye diminish sensibly. Somehow or other he suddenly got another voice from somewhere. He rose from his seat, and in doing so, without any apparent sign or motion, bade me stand.

"Your name?" he said. "Jules Meudon, Monsieur le Colonel." "Profession?" "None."

"Age?" "Three-and-twenty." "Your last domicile?" "London." "London?" "Yes, Monsieur." "Why did you not present yourself before for the conscription?" "I was ignorant of my liability to be called out." "No one may ignore the law!" "But, Monsieur le Colonel, I have been in England all my life!" "Oh! Doe yo sbeek Inglis?" "I do, colonel, having been so many years in England" (I answered in English). "Doe not sbeek zo rapidement, Mister, an' I will you understand perfectly." I thanked my lucky stars this gentleman had learnt what English he knew, for things had been taking an ill turn. He uttered the last sentence with the former affable smile on his face, and seemed quite willing to be amiable in English, though when he spoke French, it was in a very bulldoggy tone of voice. From vinegar my colonel became syrup. He asked me a few more questions, all in English, and then opened a door communicating with another office, and called out "Major!" A jolly little fat man, with big epaulettes, and a waist like a ripe gooseberry, trotted in.

I went through very nearly the same introduction with the major as with the colonel.

"Major," said the colonel, "this gentleman comes from England."

"Honoured to make your acquaintance," said the major to me, and he put his little fat warm hand, thumb first, into mine.

"He is a refractory recruit," continued the colonel. The major looked at his superior; he thought he had not heard aright, so he asked :

"What did you say, colonel?"

"I said, this gentleman is a refractory recruit!"

The little man grew redder than his pantaloons, and uttered a phrase I should not like to transcribe here, but plentifully interspersed with Rs, alluding to "a hundred thousand million bombs and bayonets." I wondered where it all came from, and the colonel laughed heartily, but quickly reassured him by saying that mine was a case of force majeure—the effects of unavoidable circumstances.

And the colonel added, in a half whisper, "Now I'll prove to you that I *can* talk English," so he began talking to me, and as I felt he was showing off to the major, who was watching us curiously to see whether I understood clearly the colonel's gibberish, I affected to listen without effort, answered quickly and without hesitation, and never allowed the conversation to flag for one moment. The end of all this was, that the colonel was delighted, and the major astonished. I was assured that the law would not go very hard with me; that providing I could bring any officer forward willing to vouch for my respectability, I should suffer no imprisonment before trial. I took a letter out of my pocket from Captain Gerard, my father's friend, and that was deemed sufficient, as the captain was garrisoned in Paris, and said he would be responsible for my appearance before the colonel of the recruiting-office.

But, there was a matter of form to be gone through. Two gendarmes were called up, and ordered to arrest me, to report the arrest with all the attendant motives and circumstances, and to immediately set me free on parole. Papers were signed and countersigned. I was marched down to the prison and delivered to the head jailer. Here a member of the "Council of Revision" made me strip, to see that I was fit for service, and was pleased to observe that "I must have been well fed in England." The jailer addressed me as "prisoner," and finally congratulated me on having got parole.

A few days afterwards, I was summoned to undergo a preliminary examination, and to give the name of the advocate who would defend me. I then stated all I knew about myself, and informed the colonel that I intended defending myself. He strongly recommended me to have a lawyer to watch my case for me, and said that if I could not afford to pay one, the state would furnish me with one in office. I still declined, stating that my case was simple and straightforward. When I had made my depositions, I was told that as there were no cases to be tried then, and as I was allowed parole, it would probably be several days before a court-martial assembled, and that, therefore, I was at liberty to roam where I pleased until I should receive a notice to appear before the court.

About ten days afterwards, I received a printed notice, filled in with sundry scratches, to the effect that I must present myself next morning, at nine o'clock, at the Rue Cherche Midi. On my arrival there, I was locked up in a little cell about five yards square, and in which there were a bed of deal planks and a bundle of straw. Taking my seat on the corner of one of the planks, which tipped and almost threw me, I looked around me and deciphered some inscriptions rudely scratched upon the walls. The first one was evidently sarcastic. It was the first verse of the favourite air in Boieldieu's opera, *La Dame Blanche*, beginning, "Ah quel plaisir d'être soldat!" Ah, what pleasure to be a soldier! Alongside of it was something written by a Breton; the Bretons, poor fellows, never forget their religion. It was the Ave Maria, written over what pretended to be a faithful representation of a colonel on an impossible horse, in the act of charging Sebastopol all by himself. And there, up in a corner, was an inscription written in miniature, acquainting prisoners that "by a judicious investment of a franc, it was just possible to obtain sundry little luxuries through the jailer." Perhaps the jailer had written this himself. A prisoner, at any rate, was sure to find it out when looking around his cell in search of something to amuse him.

At a quarter to ten, my door was unlocked, and I was placed, along with seven other prisoners, between some twenty grenadiers. We were marched through the yard, up a wide staircase, into a large lofty room. At one end of the room, and on a platform elevated about two feet from

the floor, was a long oval table covered with green cloth, on which were placed seven blotting-cases; behind each case was a chair—the seventh, forming the centre, an easy-chair, and slightly raised above the rest. Three yards to the left of this table was another small table, with a chair behind it; this was the place of the public prosecutor; at the same distance to the right of the large table was the bench for the accommodation of the advocates defending prisoners; immediately in front of the president's chair, about four yards from it, was the place where the accused stood.

When soldiers had been placed in different parts of the room, the usher called silence, and as the clock struck ten the drums sounded "le champ," the soldiers presented arms, and the court appeared: the highest in rank being a colonel, and the lowest a non-commissioned officer. When the court was seated, the advocates took their places, and finally the much-dreaded man, the procureur-impérial, walked in. He was a little thin man, with lips screwed up as if he were about to whistle, and his brow knit downward as if he were trying to cover his eyes with their folds.

The usher having declared the court open, our names were called over, and I found that I was first on the list. A file of soldiers led me to the place of the accused, and I heard my accusation read.

I was accused of not having answered the call of the conscription when I was of age, and of having gone into a foreign country to avoid serving. It was alleged against me that I had been served with a notice at my last known domicile, and that I had paid no heed to it; that when the gendarmerie sought for me, I evaded their researches; that, consequently, I was guilty of insubordination, and according to law liable to so much punishment.

I was then sworn to say nothing but the truth; I was questioned and cross-questioned by the president and the prosecutor. I explained. The judges seemed satisfied, but the procureur-impérial suddenly dropped his brief, looked at me superciliously, coughed apologetically, and delivered a most extraordinary speech, which I now condense, and give as nearly as I can remember it:

"Mr. President and gentlemen of the court, it is often difficult to understand what motives lead a man to commit a certain deed; and in rising now to address you, I must confess that I feel myself unequal to the task of explaining to you what motives can have induced Jules Meudon to leave England (where he was out of the reach of our laws) to come over here to deliver himself up to the gendarmerie, incur the risk of being condemned to several years' imprisonment—ay! to de-por-ta-tion even!—and subsequently to seven years' military servitude! His father (who was exiled from this country for a political offence against the previous dynasty) took him away when but five years of age. The son of an exile! And where

was he taken to? What was the country of his father's adoption? Was it Belgium? a country whose whole sympathies are with France? Was it Italy, whose hope has always been centred in France? Was it Prussia, or Austria: countries that have been taught to fear, if not to respect France? To no one of these, gentlemen; but to England! England, gentlemen! According to his own admission, he has been brought up as an English boy, at English schools. Need I ask what were the sentiments instilled in the mind of the young Jules Meudon? Were they such as to make him desire to serve France? And may we not infer that his mind has been poisoned by all those vituperations which England rejoices in vociferating against France? Is it unreasonable to suppose that as he grew older, his parents impressed upon him the sufferings they had undergone in exile? And are we to admit this man into the ranks of our army? Is he still a Frenchman? Is this man, with a good education, possessed of certain pecuniary means, capable of observing, noting, appreciating, understanding our resources, our administration and capabilities, having friends and—perhaps—*employers in England*, is this man to be admitted into our arsenals, garrisons, and fortresses, without our asking what are his motives? What were his motives for leaving the land of his adoption, where he at one time held a lucrative appointment, and where by his talents he could live in ease and superfluity? I will confine myself, Mr. President, to merely suggesting the foregoing questions, certain that they will give rise to serious misgivings in the mind of the court."

When he had finished this speech, he looked at me, and seemed to ask me "how I liked it?" Then he coughed, looked at his watch, and might have been talking about pumpkins, instead of recommending the court to transport a man for ten years.

I felt slightly bewildered, perplexed, and doubtful whether I ought to attempt to repudiate the insinuations made to my prejudice. But happening to look towards the advocates' bench, thinking that I should have done better to employ an advocate, I saw one of those gentlemen raise his brows to the prosecutor inquiringly, and I saw the prosecutor answer with a wink! All the blood that English roast beef had made in me rose boiling to my temples, and I said, "That I had learnt in England that a man on trial was judged for the offences of which he was accused, and not for crimes he might commit in the future; and that were I now condemned on insinuations volunteered by a person who ought to confine himself to the province of his office, I should, indeed, regret having left England." After this, I had it all my own way, proved my innocence, and was acquitted unanimously. In a few days after I received my route, draughting me into the 8th Lancers, and started for my destination.

I found out afterwards, that the object of the procureur-impérial was to get me condemned to some kind of punishment, because twenty-four hours' imprisonment even, would have forced me to serve my seven years in full, whereas my being acquitted carried with it that the two years I had been absent since I was twenty-one, would now count as if I had actually served them.

The French soldier is governed by inviolable laws, which will admit only of one interpretation. A civilian may be incarcerated for months au secret; he may shout and groan, no one will hear him; until some fine morning, maybe, the jailer opens the door of his cell, saying, as was said the other day to poor Rosalie Doise, "It was an error, go; it appears you were not the person." Two friends of mine, A. and B., met a few days since in a café. Said A. to B.: *Tiens!* where have you been the last two months?

B. *Chut!* Not so loud.

A. I've been here two or three times a week to meet you. Have you changed cafés?

B. No. But *chut*!

A. I went with your father to the Morgue, and inquired everywhere. Tell me——?

B. *Chut!* (In a whisper) *Au secret.*

Had that whisper been heard, he would probably have been an *secret* again.

Besides the full justice in trial of offences, one of the most admirable clauses in the Code de la Justice Militaire is that which recommends the judge "to inflict the mildest punishment which the most lenient interpretation of the causes of an offence may admit of." To be fair to the military authorities of France, it must be allowed that everything is done by them to make the men forget the outrage they have suffered in being forced into the army.

One of the first lessons the recruit receives, is, that the honour of wearing a uniform, and a sword or side-arms, carries with it "that his word as a soldier must be believed until such time as it shall be fully proven against him that he has forfeited it by telling a lie." One of the severest punishments he is taught to fear, is, to be obliged to appear in the streets without his side-arms; in fact, a soldier in *full dress*, and without his side-arms, seen in the streets after twelve o'clock in the day, is a marked man—one who has abused the confidence reposed in him, a quarrelsome fellow, dangerous, not worthy to wear a sword; he is pointed at, noticed, and avoided.

The young soldier is taught that brawls and fistcuffs discredit a man wearing the uniform; that if he strike a comrade he will be severely punished; and that, if on receiving a blow, he retaliate, he will also be punished; for the authorities argue that a soldier wears a sword whereabouts to resent any insult offered to him, not in the heat of the moment when he is blind with rage, but after having consulted his captain, who judges the matter. If the captain consider the affront of so serious a nature as to affect the honour of the soldier, he will, with the permission of the

colonel, direct the fencing-master to accompany the adversaries, with their seconds, to a suitable spot, that they may "arrange their differences in a military manner;" the captain never failing to advise the prévost d'armes to see that the men do one another no serious injury. If, however, the officer judge the affair to be of too trivial a nature, he only punishes the aggressor, and bids him apologise to the aggrieved. Thus French soldiers rarely quarrel; they will boast of their honour, their sword, and their prowess; but what they so esteem in themselves they respect in others. Among all their fallacious arguments in favour of military duelling, the French authorities have these: "That duelling, as practised in the army, tends to keep up the dignity of the soldier; to make soldiers respect one another; to prevent violent and coarse language; to abolish bullying, and to put each man in a position to defend himself from insult." Five or six duels a year, sum up the number of serious quarrels in a regiment. All men are reduced to one equal standard. The giant can enjoy his strength, but cannot misuse it; for, in the management of a sword not only is strength not necessary, but it is actually a hindrance to good fencing: suppleness and dexterity are to be acquired by men of all sizes and degrees of strength, and practice rewards the strong and the weak alike. The most violent lunge may be turned aside by a skewer, if the proper angle be offered to the attacking blade. A perpendicular cut from a broadsword, given with the utmost force, if it only meet in its descent the edge of a weapon flexibly held, and so placed as to direct it one or two degrees out of its perpendicular course, must infallibly miss its aim, whereas it would cut through a firmer guard less skilfully disposed.

To enable a man to defend himself, he is made to undergo severe training during the first year of his service, and is forced to attend the fencing-room five times a week. When the prévost d'armes judges him sufficiently instructed, he undergoes an examination before the colonel and staff; he is then expected to combat any adversary the colonel may select, and defend himself not only from the sword, but also from the bayonet and the lance. I need not say that the weapons are buttoned, and that the man is padded and protected. If the staff do not consider the young man skilful enough, he is bound to continue daily practice, while his more fortunate comrades are only required to practise once or twice a week. But, during his novitiate, he is protected from all bullying. The sergeants and corporals of his company are responsible for any insult or injustice done to "the young soldier." He is looked upon as a soldier child, allowances are made for his inexperience, he is humoured, his prejudices are not abruptly violated, and he is chiefly taught through example. Independent of this sort of teaching, the authorities, in forcing the men to attend the fencing-room, have another and a much more important

object in view; that is, to accustom the recruit to the sight and sound of weapons meeting in conflict—to accustom him to see clearly through a mass of crossed swords and bayonets, and to remain cool while swords flash, under shocks, unexpected blows, and rapid orders. A fencing-room in which twenty or thirty couples of men are practising, is a fair illustration of a mêlée with cold weapons. The prévôts d'armes dispersed about the apartment giving rapid instructions to thrust here, to cut there, to feint, retreat, advance, parry, halt; the stamping of feet, the shouts, the dust, and above all the energy of everybody, every man eager in good faith to defeat his opponent;—these things are calculated to accustom the recruit to the tumult of real action. Similarly, the infantry are taught dancing; not that the men should figure to advantage in a waltz or in a polka, but to train them in deportment and agility, and to teach them how to navigate through a moving and whirling crowd, and avoid jostling each other during rapid movements. The same may be said of gymnastics; the men are induced to practise them as a re-creation, but are effectually taught to analyse every movement of which their limbs are capable, to learn their strength, and how to husband it. The recruit is also taught to swim. Water, when it becomes familiar, is the best of friends. Soldiers have been known to march fifteen miles further (after a long march) under a sultry sun, when the officers have given them orders to bathe for half an hour.

The recruit is enticed to the river on a sultry broiling day. There, the fear of water naturally seizes him; but he is entrusted to the hands of a veteran swimmer, who gives him his first lesson, and little by little he becomes expert; he learns to dive too, and ascertain the nature of a river-bed, so that the engineer may judge from his report what sort of bridge may be thrown across a stream. He is taught how to swim a long time, how to rest himself, how to save a companion; he is trained to swim with his clothes on, to carry his musket dry, and to practise a thousand dodges, by which he may approach unnoticed the opposite bank of a river, where an enemy is encamped.

The medical authorities of the French army especially recommend that men inclined to diseases of the chest should be continually made to swim. The following are the effects (which M. le Docteur Dudon attributes to swimming) on the organs of respiration:

"A swimmer wishing to proceed from one place to another, is obliged to deploy his arms and legs to cut through the liquid, and to beat the water with them to sustain himself. It is to the chest, as being the central point of sustentation, that every movement of the limbs responds. This irradiation of the movements to the chest, far from being hurtful to it, are beneficial, for according to a sacred principle of physiology, the more an organ is put in action, the more vigour and aptitude it will gain to perform its

functions. Applying this principle unto natation, it will easily be conceived how the membranes of the chest of a swimmer acquire development—the pulmonary tissues firmness, tone, and energy."

From almost the first day of his arrival in the regiment, the recruit is taught how to cook every sort of food he is ever likely to have; how best to dress rice, hard biscuits, vegetables; how to make bread, to make soup, and generally how to make the most of a little. Every man has his day by turns in the kitchen, and he who dishes up the best soup or ragoût receives the congratulations of his comrades. He has the honour of being elected chef de cuisine on certain festive occasions, such as the fête-day of the emperor, when the troops receive extra and daintier rations. He gets more than hollow praise, for he is allowed to select, for himself and a few of his own chums, the best of the tit-bits.

So far and further is the recruit taught. All this he must know practically before he can aspire to the rank of corporal. When he has finished drill, fencing, gymnastics, dancing, swimming, and thoroughly understands the work of a good practical soldier, and the duty of subordination, he has books delivered to him in which he may learn how to instruct recruits, may gain a theoretical knowledge of what he knows practically, and may prepare himself to compete for the chevrons, and ultimately to become a distinguished officer—for the French military authorities seek talent in every class: fortune being with them quite an inferior consideration. Let a man only show aptitude, and the government will furnish him with means to sustain any rank it may confer. More than that: wise military laws and regulations will compel him to live within his pay—not within his private means, but his military pay.

It is not many years since the purchase-system was abolished in the French army. The present laws or ordinances regulating advancement in the French army, came into life at different periods of the Revolution of '93; were collected, revised, and decreed as a code, by Napoleon the First; and have remained in force under each successive dynasty. So clearly do these laws specify that merit, and merit alone, shall entitle to promotion, that a clause in them authorises a meritorious man to prove his right to it, when any arbitrary act of administration has deprived him of his just advantages. The mode of reclamation is indicated as follows: "Any soldier, non-commissioned officer, or officer, having any claims to promotion or other rewards, shall be enabled to reclaim them of the general inspector, when that officer visits the corps at the time of the inspections."

The various indisputable claims a soldier can have to promotion may be succinctly summed up as the following:

1. General good conduct. Every punishment inflicted must be noted and explained in the "Régistre des Punitions," and a man's claims in this respect can always be precisely verified.

2. Aptitude and proficiency in drill and manœuvres. Weekly reports from the instructors and officers detailing the progress and degree of proficiency of each man, show the skill he has acquired.

3. Reading, writing, and arithmetic, for the private; and higher branches of education for non-commissioned and commissioned officers. The number of points the aspirant has obtained in the various regimental schools, prove the extent of learning he possesses.

4. Theoretical knowledge in all elementary military matters, such as drill, garrison service, camp service, campaign service and regulations, sword exercise, natation; gymnastics for the private, and for non-commissioned officers and officers; in addition to these, topography, fortification, strategy, tactics, languages, &c. &c. Quarterly competitive examinations allot to each aspirant, a number, given according to order of merit.

Amiable disposition, good manners, even physical advantages, are all the subjects of private reports. They will help a man to obtain rank; but they are by no means indispensable to the soldier who has the knowledge and acquirements enumerated above. The colonel (who can promote up to the rank of sergeant-major) forms his tableau d'avancement, or promotion list, according to information given to him by the regimental council of instruction. If A stand first on that list, A will obtain the first vacancy which can afford him another step. In order to maintain constant emulation, this list is subject to quarterly changes, so that a man appearing first on the list this quarter, may, if he neglect his education or misconduct himself, be last the next.

The inspector-general witnesses an annual examination of aspirants to any rank—and satisfies himself that each man has been inscribed on the "promotion list" according to his order of merit—and from the number of points obtained by aspirants to ranks which a colonel cannot confer, he forms a promotion list which he forwards to the minister for war. The minister, on consulting these examination reports of the various regiments, can, at a glance, judge which is the fittest man to fill any vacancy. Of course, each rank undergoes a different examination, and a lieutenant of infantry cannot be promoted to a captaincy in the cavalry.

There exists throughout the whole French army a keen but fair competition for any vacancy that may occur in any regiment. If, for example, a vacant lieutenant-colonelship occur in the seventh regiment of infantry, it does not at all follow that the major of that regiment will get it; for it will often happen that a major in the tenth or thirtieth, or any other regiment, obtained more points at the last inspection, or is for other reasons more worthy of it. In the event of a regiment going on foreign service, a clever rule prevents a major incapable of higher command from accompanying the regiment. The autho-

rities wisely foresee that in the event of the death of the superior officers, the command of the regiment would devolve on an unfit man.

An act of intrepidity, sustained bravery during action, long and meritorious service, are exceptional ways by which a man may secure advancement. But promotion on account of long service is chiefly given to a man about to retire, as a reward that will enable him to receive a better pension. Some military authority said that "some men were born to be drummers, others corporals, others sergeants, others captains and majors, and a few to be colonels and generals." The French, to their own great national advantage, allow each soldier's genius to find its right place in the army.

THIRTEEN, FOURTEEN.

GREAT are still the supposed mysteries of numbers. To this day we hear how, in a foreign gambling town, a jealous footman having killed a fellow-servant with a carving-knife, and then thrown himself out of a second-floor window whereby he cracked his skull, there was a run in the lottery on numbers found to correspond (by the signification of number to be found in letters) to the words skull, window, and carving-knife.* To this day, people comparatively free from superstition will not willingly sit down in parties of thirteen. There is a legend of the co-existence with the Wandering Jew of a festive Parisian, who, when not professionally engaged, sits in his room ready dressed, brushed and perfumed, to come at a moment's notice in the character of an invited guest to any entertainment at which by mishance, a few disappointments, or an unexpected dropper-in, has made by addition or subtraction the terrible party of thirteen. The main source of the superstition is, that there were thirteen at Our Lord's supper, when the betrayer was of the company. So it is that although we call one holy day in every year Good Friday, the transcendently solemn and momentous event then celebrated has been connected with the superstition that makes Friday an unlucky day.

It must have been by reason of writing on a Friday, some weeks ago,† that we miscounted into this unfortunate thirteen, the number of the Princes of Wales, and made his Royal Highness, who is now entering into full possession of his dignities as the first gentleman in England, the thirteenth, as he is NOT, instead of the fourteenth, as he is. We went without error through the roll of actually appointed princes, missing none, but Friday was too strong for us and caused us to miss count: so that having said of one that he was the fifth, we said of the next also that he was the fifth, and thus gave to every prince thereafter his right number minus one, until we got his Royal Highness into the awful predicament of being, in the eyes of Mrs. Grundy, a doomed thirteenth man. It was

* See, also, page 309 of the present volume.

† Page 78.

the last first gentleman who was the exceptional odd man. But let us say on behalf of Number Thirteen, that it was accounted lucky and not unlucky by the real inquirers into the mysteries of 1, 2, 3, the neoplatonist magicians. It was the happy number in which the wise men of this world were brought to the feet of the infant Saviour; it was on the thirteenth day after the nativity, that the star led the magi into Bethlehem. Fourteen is, therefore, less lucky than thirteen in the true system of magical superstition, for the moon was fourteen days old at the crucifixion, although, on the other hand, it was observed that Saint Matthew, by the form of his genealogies, shows a particular friendship for fourteen. But if we take a thorough plunge into this subject, it will be clear that the attainment by the fourteenth prince of the age of twenty-one, or two sevens becoming three sevens, points to the important fact that seven is the real index of power in this case. Now, seven is a number of great might, and its might lives also in its multiples. It includes the power of all its predecessors, seeing that it consists of one and six, of two and five, of three and four, wherefore it was said by an old magician to be "most full of all majesty." It is full also of life, since it unites the soul and body, for the body is of the four elements and has four temperaments; the soul is of three—reason, passion, and desire. Shall not, then, the number that keeps body and soul together, signify long life? A long life undisturbed by discord, seeing that great has been found to be the harmony resident in seven; seven also is the ruling number that befits the omens of a prince. The earliest chance of life is to a seven months' child. In seven months the born infant begins its teething, in twice seven months it can sit without being held, in thrice seven months it can speak, in four times seven it can walk, and it used to be added—for in the sixteenth century, children were not weaned when their teeth came—in five times seven months, it begins to dislike the nurse's milk. At seven years, the male child becomes a boy, the milk teeth fall, full power of speech is attained; at twice seven years, the boy becomes a youth; at thrice seven years, the youth becomes a man and ceases to grow taller; at four times seven years, his body has attained its full natural breadth; at five times seven years, his strength has attained its full maturity; at six times seven years, the man has learnt the right ordering and skilled use of his faculties; at seven times seven, he is ripe; and seven decades is the term of his appointed life. Seven feet is the extreme natural limit to the height of a man's body, which has seven principal parts. That body is sustained by breathing and feeding, and it used to be held that seven hours was the limit of life without breath, seven days the limit of life without food. The seventh day of a disease was held to be the critical day. There were seven Pleiades—seven planets—the moon changed by sevens in her quarters. Seven was the great number by which the Hebrews swore;

seventh years were sacred among the Jews, and seven times a day the prophet uttered praise. There are seven days, seven ages of the world, seven colours. It used to be said there were seven liberal, seven mechanical, and seven prohibited, arts. Rome had seven hills, and seven kings, and seven civil wars. Seven was the number of the wise men of Greece. There were seven sleepers, seven sacraments, seven orders of clergy, seven capital sins. There are seven holes in a man's head—two at the nose, two at the eyes, two at the ears and one at the mouth. With such facts before us, dark indeed must have been the Friday that connected a thirteen with the thrice seventh year of the twice seventh Prince of Wales.

Yet thirteen is good. They are ignorant of the true mysteries of magic who consider that number unlucky; and as to Friday, was it not a most fortunate day for the renowned Captain Gonsalvo, who, when he fought on a Friday, always thrashed the French? But so it is that the day lucky for one man is declared by the observers of signs and marvels to be unlucky for another. Tuesday was the unlucky day for Thomas à Becket. On a Tuesday, the peers sat against him at Northampton; on a Tuesday, he was banished; on a Tuesday, he had a vision warning him of martyrdom to come; on a Tuesday, he returned from exile; on a Tuesday he was slain; and on a Tuesday, fifty years afterwards, his body was translated. For Henry the Eighth and his family, Thursday was the fatal day. On a Thursday he died. On a Thursday, Edward the Sixth died. On a Thursday, Queen Mary died. On a Thursday, Queen Elizabeth died. Let Friday, then, assert itself, and let the blot also be wiped from the good number thirteen—the number of liberality, the baker's dozen.

NUTCRACKER.

"WANDERING in his head!" said a voice somewhere in the dark.

What voice was it, I wondered? And where was it? But I could not pursue the inquiry, having other things to attend to.

* * * * *

I had never before realised how much I loved her. Never, indeed, had anything till now made me conscious how entirely this love of her had transfused itself through all my inner life; nor how it had been all this while (as I now began to grow aware) her song, and not the song of the blackbird, that had made so pleasant to me our customary evening walks in the President's orchard; her smile, and not that famous sparkling hock, which had so sweetened the old gentleman's daily hospitalities. And now, that this insolent puppy from Paris, that *he* should presume to invade the distant sacred sweetness of that beloved soul, with the familiarity of his smiles, and the frivolity of his compliments!

My mind went back to early times, and seemed to creep into the past for refuge. My old uni-

versity life, my half forgotten student days, returned in thought. I began to think about my cousin Theodore, with a dreary but intense interest in a thousand fantastic speculations as to his unknown fate. Poor fellow! I had not seen him for years; and, in any other state of mind than that which I now experienced, I should have implicitly credited the universal opinion that he was dead. We had been friends at the university. He had acquired, I know not how, amongst his fellow-students a reputation for ability, which his extreme eccentricity rather stimulated than justified. He was studious, but all his studies were of the most useless and unpractical. He spent extravagant sums of money in the purchase of books which, when he had once read, he thrust into the stove, and which any other man would have burnt without reading. He never issued out of the house till the rest of the world withdrew into it. Then, about twilight, he was sometimes to be seen prowling among swamps and solitary places, and running eagerly after moths and those insects which, like himself, issued forth only at twilight. His only constant companion was an old violin. He would pass the greater part of each day in extracting from this instrument of torture the most excruciating sounds that ever afflicted mortal ears, and became the nuisance of all his neighbours. He affected to despise all the learning that was cultivated at the university; and, when he went up for his degree, his answers were so extravagant, and his papers so unintelligible, that it was ignominiously refused to him. This seemed to prey on his spirits, and disorder his intellect. For it was soon noticed that his conduct became more extravagant than ever. There was in the neighbourhood of the university a small lake, which was so surrounded with mountains that it could only be reached on foot, and even thus with difficulty. Here it is believed that he used to pass, in complete solitude, the greater part of his days, and often the entire nights. When questioned, he spoke very wildly, declaring that he was about to espouse a princess of vast possessions and indescribable beauty, with what other ridiculous and incredible assertions I know not. One evening, I was impelled by curiosity to follow him to this lake. I found him standing on the shore of it, and listening with apparent rapture to a troop of frogs that were croaking horribly. This, he assured me, with great gravity, was a chorus of students who were singing a sublime evening hymn to Nature. He added, that they were members of a university which had been founded in times of the most remote antiquity, underneath the waters of this lake, where there was also a magnificent library, of which all the books were written upon silver, and that he had already matriculated at this seat of learning. He was very angry when I remonstrated with him upon the incoherence and absurdity of this discourse. Soon afterwards he disappeared, and was never more seen nor heard

of. It was generally believed, though the body could not be found, that he had drowned himself.

I was absorbed in the most extravagant speculations as to the possible fate of Theodore, when I found myself on the skirt of the forest, and just in front of my old friend, the Sentinel Oak. I called this tree the Sentinel Oak, because it was always the first object that attracted my attention in the wood, to which I had of late become a daily and a lonely visitor. It stood in the van of the vast hosts of the woodland, and was the tallest, and, seemingly, the oldest tree of the forest. But, as I now glanced at my old friend, I could not but notice the dreary and dejected change in his appearance. The leaves, with a grey and haggard hue, hung flat and listless from the drooping boughs. There was an indescribable look of suppressed pain and injured pride throughout the whole tree. As I passed under the great branch which had long over-roofed with a rich baldachin of verdure the only pathway to the interior of the forest — forming a sort of triumphal arch to the issue of the chariots of the wind — I found myself, for the first time, compelled to stoop my head. When I had done so, the whole branch fell to the ground with a loud crash.

As I turned, startled by the sudden fall of this mighty limb (by which, had I passed under it but a moment later, I had surely been felled to the earth), something swiftly rustled past me out of the quivering leaves, and slipped with an angry snapping sound into the neighbouring underwood. Something which I cannot describe. Something small, with large bright eyes, and a glance of concentrated scorn and sorrow. What was it? Probably nothing. If anything at all, it must have been some forest creature suddenly dislodged from its customary haunt in that ruin of writhing leaves and twigs over which I now bent; and my own morbid indignation at the injury inflicted on my poor old friend of the forest had read in the scared eye of some terrified reptile what appeared to be the protest of resentful Nature. For I now saw, scored in white upon the broad brown bark of the dismembered oak, the fatal cross of its destiny. I remembered that the wiseacres of our commune had doomed the whole woodland to slow destruction; that soon the tall pines and stately firs would be chained together like felons, and sent in doomed dozens to the neighbouring seaport, while the humble underwood would be stacked in fagots for my neighbour's hearth. Already the verdict was gone forth! And the woodman had left his saw in the limbs of my lost favourite. Mentally cursing man, the universal destroyer, I plunged into the depth of the forest, and traversed with bitter thoughts and heedless steps the tangled labyrinth that thickened round me. Perhaps I should not have paused in my unconscious rambles to admire the excessive beauty of the solitude, had I not been suddenly almost overwhelmed by a flood of fragrance so intense as to make me curious to

discover the source of it. On looking up, I perceived that I stood under the branches of an old gnarled walnut-tree, with a curious hollow trunk fantastically twisted and wrinkled, and staggering under the weight of its branches, from which this penetrating odour proceeded.

Some little way beyond this tree the narrow landscape (bounded elsewhere by the green shore of the rippling woodland) was shut in by a huge heap of tumbled stones and splinters of rock, overgrown with dangling desiduous wild flowers, and looking like ruins dropped there by chance from some abolished planet long ago. For our land is not a mountain land, and they seemed to have got there from nowhere on earth. Over these slabs and blocks a little rivulet came leaping down, full of haste and importance. But in the course of the untold ages which its little life had outlived, the water had hollowed out for itself in the stony channel underneath a smooth deep basin; and there it fell asleep, and forgot its hasty trouble of the moment before, or only moved slowly round and round in sleepy objectless circles—a lustrous darkness danced over by the innumerable midge. I wandered on, and, by the shore of this diminutive lake, lay down on the dry grasses and watched the listless water with listless eyes. Can you remember having ever (when, perhaps, you were a child) so pored and brooded over some little puddle blown by the breeze in a windy field, or some tiny tarn of black rain droppings stagnant in the hollow trunk of a rotten tree, that at length, by that mysterious power of suggestion with which everything in nature is imbued, it has begun to assume vast proportion and spacious significance, transporting you to the shores of the Infinite, and amazing you with the depths of a profound tranquillity or the endless rolling of irrevocable waves? I cannot explain, I cannot well describe this sensation. There seemed to bask before me, as I gazed with half-shut eyes, a fairy lake, forlorn in Elsland, with enchanted shores. The little larve that haunt about such waters were forming fast in busy clusters, and through the limpid depths I could clearly see them moving to the sunny surface, and budding into being. All the process of a marvellous birth passed in a moment under my eye. I watched with amazement and delight one of these tiny creatures unsheath her little wings from the tender crystal, unwrap the swathed damp sails of delicate gauze, and dry in the warm sun the fragile apparatus of her first fine voyage. Then, with a tiny shudder of intense enjoyment, this minim of nature launched her heedless life into the buoyant and boundless blue. Transported with admiration, "Bright image," I exclaimed, "teach me, if I cannot share, at least to revere, the perfect confidence of this tiny being in the measureless beneficence of nature!"

Hardly had these words escaped me, when I felt upon my hand, which lay listless in the sunny grass, a sharp and smarting sense of sudden and acute irritation. I turned round

angry and surprised. I was stung. The little creature which I had just been admiring had settled on my hand, and was making her first meal on my flesh and blood. "Ah, fool!" I muttered, as I crushed the offender, and extinguished in an instant its offensive existence—"I am rightly served, whose preposterous fancy invested with a spiritual beauty this bloodthirsty insect. So it is with us, and so it is with you, frivolous and ephemeral parasites of the beam, beings of a baser appetite and lower life than ours, fair only because you are so fragile, we dream of you, and love you in our dreams, till you wake our folly with the sting which it deserves!"

Perhaps I unconsciously uttered these words aloud. I cannot be sure of this, but I am sure that, to my unspeakable surprise, they elicited in reply an immoderate peal of laughter. "Ha! ha!" cried a voice behind me, "truly this is a superfine philosopher, that would embrace the infinite, yet cannot bear the bite of a gnat!"

I turned round with an indignation, which was increased by my extreme surprise at this sudden and insulting ejaculation; but I failed to discover any intruder by whom the words could have been uttered. The solitude was unbroken. There was not the trace of a footprint on the grass, nor the glimpse of a face through the trees. I was alone. "Fancy again!" I thought; and, angry with myself, I relapsed into reflections which were far from soothing. "Alas!" I mused, "why should we, finite and impotent creatures, so ardently cling to the mockery of this terrible idea—the Infinite? Embrace it! who can? Nature for ever escapes us. We are forbidden to approach her. To obtain the merest insight into the least of her laws exhausts the lifetime of man." I thought of my lamented friend the late Professor Staubenschnabel. In the ardour of early youth he wished, as he once told me, "to know something of nature." He began with botany, this being, he was informed, the easiest and best assured of the natural sciences. He attended with assiduity and enthusiasm the botanical lectures. By the time he had mastered the classification of Linneus, he was invited to forget all he had learned and begin over again, since the French botanists had invented a better system of classification. This also he mastered, and was finally told off to the section of the Cryptogamia. He had fully exhausted this branch of botany soon after he arrived at middle age. Somewhere about this time, my poor friend's ill luck would have it that the botanical archivist one day asked him to catalogue a valuable collection of dried plants which had lately been sent from the Himalayas. In the course of this occupation, Herr Staubenschnabel's attention was attracted by a particular species of gnaphalium, unlike any yet known in Europe. Being more conscientious than prudent, he published an interesting work upon this specimen, which created much sensation, and was immediately replied to by three other interesting works from the pen of three hostile professors.

My friend was thus engaged in a controversy, to which his reputation was compromised, about a gnaphalium. The controversy survived him. He died in the midst of it, at the age of sixty, withered with research, and exhausted with anxiety, as dry and wizened a piece of humanity as his own dried specimen. In fact, an organised human gnaphalium.

Again the mocking voice replied, "Ay! ay! you profess to love nature; nay, you sometimes boast of your intimacy with her—you, the self-styled men of science and art! yet not one of you all dare approach her but with due preparation, decently gloved and decorously coated. Which of you dare for one moment discard that eternal swallow-tailed integument, which the tailor provides for the conventionalities that now pass amongst men for the humanities, and fearlessly plunge into the glowing fountain of her boundless love? You are not natural yourselves. How, then, can you enter into the nature of other beings?"

Again I turned round, convinced that my ears, into which these words had been uttered, could not have been simply the fools of my imagination. This time my search was more minute than before; but, though it was not altogether without result, the mystery of the voice remained unsolved. Lying upon the grass beside me, I now noticed a diminutive object that looked like the miniature caricature of a man. I instinctively started back, almost persuaded that I was actually in the presence of a gnome, kobold, or wood-goblin. In a few seconds the truth was unmistakable, and I could not but laugh at my absurdly foolish alarm. The redoubtable wooden goblin represented a personage splendidly accoutred as a hussar, in crimson coat, with shining cuirass of steel, long leathern boots, spurs, and sabre. The countenance was grotesque, but singularly benevolent and friendly. He had a merry roguish eye, a prominent nose adorned under the nostril with a heavy moustache of glossy black horsehair, a high complexion, and a mouth of enormous size, which had the merit of being able to crush between its massive jaws the largest and toughest of walnuts. In short, the toy was the German household Institution—Nutcracker.

All my resentment and all my alarm evaporated in a fit of laughter so spontaneous and so hearty, that my little wooden friend himself seemed to participate in my mirth, wagging his large jaws, and grinning till his twinkling eyes seemed buried in his glossy mustachios. Who could be angry in the presence of Nutcracker? But how came this quaint little toy here, in the furthest and loneliest spot of the remote forest? For surely no tree bears nutcrackers as well as nuts. The toy could not have walked here. Nor ridden here neither, nor driven. Unless, indeed, Nutcracker had made a coach of *me*? Had I myself brought him with me, in a fit of forgetfulness? And had I dropped him out of my pocket on the grass, unconsciously:—having perchance intended that very morning to have dropped him, elsewhere, into the lap of my darling's blue-eyed

little sister? No. But, even granting such a supposition, how was I to account for the mysterious voice? If it were ludicrous to believe in a *walking* toy, how much more ludicrous to believe in a *talking* toy; nay, to assume that the toy in question was ready to crack metaphysical nuts with me, as boldly as if these were the kind of nuts for which it had been specially manufactured. Again the little mocking voice was in my ear. "What, Herr Professor! Still incredulous? How hard it is to get intimate with you man-creatures! but you are a pretty sort of philosopher, ha! ha! angered by a gnat, and frightened by a toy!"

I rubbed my eyes. There was Nutcracker standing bolt upright before me, and winking his roguish eye at me.

"You little rascal, what are you doing there?"

"Enjoying the beauties of nature, and the society of my learned friend," replied Nutcracker, with the utmost coolness.

"Was it you, then, that scampered past me when I stood by the fallen bough?"

"Precisely," replied Nutcracker. "And you may tell your precious commune when you go back to it, that the bourgomeister, and, indeed, all the others to boot, are no better than a pack of barbarous blockheads. What right have you to turn us all (myself, I mean, and my fellow-foresters) out of house and home after this discourteous fashion? What harm have we ever done any of you?"

"It is certainly," said I, "a shame to destroy this noble forest."

"I am glad, at least, that such is *your* opinion," said Nutcracker. "Listen. There is an old walnut-chest in your house. Do you know it?"

"Yes. It is stowed away in the lumber-room. My father would have sold it if he had lived, but I never had the heart to part with it."

"That is lucky for you," said Nutcracker. "It has secured you my friendship, and may be the means of preserving it. One of the panels of that chest is formed from a portion of the root of a tree of which I was formerly proprietor. The root of that tree is the root of our acquaintance, for the fact of its being in your possession has enabled me to establish a connexion between us. In that old walnut-chest there is a parchment that will establish before any court of law, the ancient title of your family to the forest. You must find the parchment, and enforce the claim. But there is little time to lose. Delay will undo us. Owing to the indifference of your father, and your own neglect, the parchment has been left to the mercy of the rats, and is now in a most precarious condition. The rats have already gnawed through the walnut-panel, and have begun to gnaw at the parchment. If they should succeed in nibbling off the seals and signatures, the deed will of course be invalid. Do not forget this when you go home. But, meanwhile, I am anxious that we should be better acquainted. My house is close by, and I shall be glad to conduct you thither, as we can talk there at our ease."

I accepted with eagerness the invitation of my new acquaintance. We soon reached the spot on which it seemed to me that a short while ago I had stood, almost overpowered by the strangely pungent odour of the old walnut-tree. The tree itself, however, I no longer recognised. But I noticed that the mansion which we now entered was entirely built of walnut-wood, richly carved and fantastically decorated. The house was shaped like a tower, and as we passed under the vaulted porch and entered a spacious hall, I perceived that this tower was longitudinally traversed from roof to basement by a spiral wooden staircase of exquisite workmanship. Ascending this staircase, we entered a large airy chamber, with an open window in a sunny recess, surrounded by a broad balcony, overlooking the little lake we had just left, and trellised with the most fragrant flowers. Here Nutcracker, having motioned me to an old wooden settle in the embrasure of the window, sat down beside me, with the air of a man who is well satisfied with his household gods. I could not repress an exclamation of delight at the prospect which I beheld from the window beside me. Millions of brilliant winged things were fluctuating to a fitful slumberous music of their own making in the liquid golden air all round. The little lake, paved with the vivid blue and white of a mimic heaven, lay basking in its basalt bed, filled with the sweetness of soft light and solacing shade, and vaguely over-voyaged by multitudes of the mariner spider.

"I think," said Nutcracker, "that you will better comprehend the sympathy with which I am induced to regard you, if I give you a short account of my history."

"Nothing," I replied, "could afford me greater pleasure."

THE HISTORY OF NUTCRACKER.

I am not a native of this earth. I am a child of the moon. I was born in that planet, and my earliest years were passed among the lunar snows. The moon, as you know, is the nearest planet to the earth. She is the younger sister and loving handmaiden of your green-robed world. Therefore it is there that, upon leaving this earth, the spirits of the departed first halt upon their journey onwards. The moon is the resting-place of the dead. The poor tired souls when they first leave this world are so sore and weary that they cannot go much further till they have had rest and sleep. So they reach the moon faint and drooping, and there they are allowed to repose their troubled, anxious hearts, and enjoy a deep sweet slumber, from which they wake refreshed, and soothed, and quieted.

It is the duty of the moon-children to comfort these poor careworn spirits of earth when they come among us, and to lay them gently asleep among the silent snows and cool and shady places of the planet of peace.

The moon-spirits love all these strangers from the earth, but chiefly the little children; for between these and ourselves there is a greater af-

finity; and we understand the child-spirits, and the child-spirits understand us, as soon as they come among us. For there is no development in the moon; no change; no increase; no diminution; no death. Nothing grows there. The air that decays, and the fire that destroys, and the water that wastes, are unknown in the lunar land. There, all things remain as they were left long ago, and all places are full of peace. Therefore the moon-spirits can never grow beyond childhood. They are immortal children, and never grow old. The whole surface of the moon is covered with snow. When the sunbeams fall upon this snow they become crystallised. It is the business of the moon-children to pick up these crystallised sunbeams as they lie upon the lunar snows, and throw them down upon the earth. There, as they fall, they are melted in the mild blue air, and diffused into the sunlight of earth. Night is the happiest time in the moon. For then our tender tasks are done. There are no more sunbeams to gather up. All is quiet. The dead slumber in the lunar caves with a strange still glory on their pale upturned faces. And we spirits of the moon sit silent on the smooth cold snows, and look into the deep purple spaces, and wonder at the multitude of stars. Now, one night, there came sailing down from Heaven on the blue and noiseless element that flows between the silver stars, a company of angels. They were clothed in long white vesture that flowed in folds beneath their feet and floated backwards as they flew. The shining of their upturned wings, and lifted hair, sent far behind them a steadfast intense light, like a flame that is blown upon by the wind. Their hands were folded on their bosoms, and each angel bore a bright green palm. They were singing a solemn hymn, and as they sailed by the moon, we called to them across the night, and they paused on their downward flight, upon the snowy lunar shore, and blessed us as they passed.

The angels told us that they were bound for the earth, where they were sent to witness and to solemnise with song the stupendous beneficence of a divine event. For the earth, they told us, was full of sorrow and grief; and there was no refuge upon earth from the sins that were in it; but evil walked up and down upon earth and never rested; and the spirits of men were so filled with pride and oppression that they had no pity even for themselves. But this night there should be born among men a Being destined to redeem and regenerate the poor distracted earth; who should teach the tired souls to trust, and the hopeless hands to pray, and comfort the thousand aching hearts of men. Therefore, these angels had been sent from above, to attest and to celebrate the entrance upon earth of this Holy Spirit of Love. And when the angels came back, singing up to Heaven triumphant hallelujahs through the thrilled and tingling hollows of the deep blue night, they each cast down their paradise palms upon the moon, and strewed with green benediction the pure white lunar snows.

That was the first green ever seen in the moon. For in the lunar world, there is no verdure. The moon-children were very much perplexed how best they should honour the angel's gift. But at last we planted the green palm-branches in the soft white snow, and broke the brittle sun-crystals into shining splinters, and decked, and studded the verdurous stems with these glittering lights, till they twinkled brightly with trembling beams, each like a tree of stars. Then we danced hand-in-hand, with happy hymns upon the milk-white snow, about our Christmas Tree. For when the angels had passed us we were singing a loud glad song in a language unknown to us: but they told us that they were singing the Mass of Christ, and we sung about the burning branches in our own language the remembered music of the angel's song, and called these trees the trees of Christmas. These were the first Christmas-trees that ever existed. But I myself, for reasons you will presently understand, and for the sake of my friends the earth-children, have long since instituted upon earth these rites of my native land. Well, time passed, as you say down here. I use your language, but my friend the Doctor Lacerta (to whom I hope by-and-by to introduce you) will prove to you that what you call time and space have no real existence; that they are not things, nor even qualities of things, but only your way of thinking of things. However, I cannot now discuss with you these rudiments of knowledge. When you are better able to receive his instruction, I shall request my friend the Doctor, who is as benevolent as he is wise, to take you in hand.

There came throughout all the universe a time of terror and disaster which I cannot even yet recall without a shudder. What had happened we knew not in the moon, or only vaguely gathered from the voices of denunciation which reached us from the vast eclipse. Thus we learned only that some intolerable wrong had been consummated upon earth. That mankind had rejected the Beloved One, and murdered their only friend. Even the Powers of Darkness were appalled. The stars were quenched. The abyss groaned, from its innermost, audible grief. Every world was shaked and racked in the convulsion of the universe. The moon was suddenly swathed in thick dark, caught upon the stifling shadow of the agonised earth, and split from centre to surface as though with the effort to cast forth from her heart the guilty knowledge of some insupportable secret. How my brothers fared in that wild moment I have never known. For I myself, in the throes of the lunar convulsion, was uplifted, whirled and dashed down, down, down, into the terrible unknown dark. When consciousness returned to me, I was lying faint and dizzy in the midst of what then seemed to me a wondrous hanging garden. It was a long green avenue suspended slantwise in air from a tall rough dusky tower, and hedged on either hand with layers and clusters of lucent cloven fans of fluttering verdure. In fact, as I

perceive you already understand, I had fallen on the branch of a walnut-tree. I fell light, for I was a little spirit, and had no bones to break. I was soon on my feet, and forcibly attracted forwards by an intense and delicious fragrance, which was exhaling from a smooth green globe pendant just above me. The first impulse of a sense of desire, such as I had never felt before, was to press my lips to the source of this new delight. Then, with an uncontrollable longing to absorb into my inmost being its entire sweetness, my lips instinctively opened and sought to close again upon the fragrant fruit. But instantly a sharp pain shot through my whole frame, I felt my jaws wrenched wide and dislocated, my head seemed breaking open, and again I fell, stunned by the sudden pang, and soon senseless. When I recovered my senses, I no longer recognised myself. My original radiant form was changed, irretrievably changed, into the little deformed object you behold. I had tasted earthy fruit and fallen. Consigned to such a body, my fall would probably have proved fatal to me altogether, if it had not been broken by a thick and strongly interwoven net of tangled wild-flowers, in which I now found myself deposited. Millions of tiny transparent creatures, whose infinitesimal limbs seemed absolutely substanceless, although emitting as they moved, in infinite variety, the most brilliant and intense colours,—some of them a deep quivering purple, some the tenderest rose-tint, others a vivid vermillion, others again an ardent amber,—some with golden crowns and tiny spears, some neck-deep in little violet frills, and others leaning languid over the brims of hollow crimson conchs, but all variously formed, and variously clothed, were busily clustering about me, with welcoming faces and benignant eyes. What chiefly struck me in the appearance of these little beings was the strange combination of what seemed to be an imperfect organisation with the incredible beauty of certain particulars. They made upon me the effect of creatures in a state of transition, only partially developed and struggling to shape themselves into other forms, yet apparently unable to complete with ease the inherent design of their ultimate organisation. Each seemed restless with little and tremulous with an incessant internal effort. These little creatures, as soon as they perceived that I was aware of their presence, began to sing about me (millions of little whisperous voices) some such words as these:

Who shall restore us the leaves
Which the locust hath eaten?
Who shall conquer the canker that grieves
The roses we sweeten?
What shall take from us, the frail, the infirm,
That curse that in spring lets
Feed forlorn in the greenwood the great palmer
worm
With his wonderful winglets?
And the young stems that still are
A prey to the tooth
Of the mail'd caterpillar
That creepeth uncouth!

What shall teach him how ill are
 His kisses forsooth
 That yet rob without ruth
 The first hopes of our youth?
 And the snail sliding off in
 The rain, leaves the stain
 Of dishonour upon us,
 And the worm from his coffin
 Again and again,
 Crawling forth has undone us.
 Thee we hail O Deliverer with lips of delight.
 There's a wrong in the world that is hard to set right.
 Yet O waited and welcom'd! thy footsteps among us,
 Were foretold in the songs that our forefathers sung us.
 And, O true one and tender,
 We trust thee with tears,
 Who anew now, shall render
 Release to our fears.
 Come to us, renew us
 And solace the years
 With new life, love endears!

The singers then told me that they were Anthesphore, or flower-elves. That their race was in endless feud with all the clans of the earth-worms, who waged war upon them without cessation, and inflicted upon them the most cruel injuries. That hitherto it had been found impossible to bring about any reconciliation between the two hostile races, as their respective rights were very undefined, the original record of those rights being quite out of reach, and so concealed in the remotest archives of the universe that it could not be consulted. But that an ancient tradition existed amongst the Anthesphore that in the course of time a Deliverer should appear, who should elucidate the laws that had so long been in dispute, and mitigate the sufferings of this afflicted race. The expected Deliverer was to descend amongst them, in a certain place, and upon a certain day, and should be known by certain signs which they had at once recognised as having been fulfilled in my advent. When I protested that I knew nothing of their laws and was quite unable to assist them, they became very mysterious, and replied that this also had been predicted; but that I was to seek out the Wise One, who lives alone, and knows all things, and he would instruct me how to act. When I asked for further information about this mysterious being, they declared they knew nothing more than that I was to search the land till I found a flowing water, and that if I followed the flowing of this water, it would bring me to a rock with a deep cavern where I should find the Wise One. Then they began to sing:

The wave in its flowing
 Shall find out the stone
 Where sitteth, all knowing,
 The Wise One alone.

And to every question that I asked they only repeated this song; so that at last the sound of it seemed to abide in my head, and when they stopped singing, I still heard the words—

The wave in its flowing
 Shall find out the stone.

I promised the Anthesphore that I would endeavour to find out the Wise One. After long

search I discovered a water issuing from a rock and flowing into a narrow channel of the stone. The little waves, leaping fast upon each other, seemed to be singing as they hurried along:

We seek ever flowing
 Thoro' bramble and stone,
 The Wise, the all-knowing,
 That dwelleth alone.

I followed them as fast as I could across the stony ridges under which they ran. At last the water leaped abruptly down a chasm, and disappeared under the earth. It did not seem possible to follow the stream any longer. All further progress was barred by the mighty rock under which the water fell headlong out of sight. I looked up in despair, and on the summit of the rock I beheld Doctor Lacerta—the oldest living lizard, and therefore the wisest, in this part of the world. The wisdom of the lizards cannot be measured, nor even conceived of by men, whose origin is of infinitely later date in creation. The lizard tribe were the first possessors of this world. Many varieties of that extraordinary race have long since become extinct; indeed, had they been permitted to endure, the world could not possibly have contained so much knowledge. But the race itself still exists, diminished in size, but retaining full possession of many of the most remarkable of its early faculties. The reason of the immense science possessed by the lizards is in the fact that these creatures are gifted by nature with so fine and susceptible an integument, that their inmost thought and most transient sensations are instantaneously, and by no conscious effort, imprinted in legible characters upon the surface of their tails. When these tails are completely filled with the mystic writing which they are framed to contain, they drop off, and are replaced by new ones; each tail being, in this way, a complete chapter of lizard biography. The cast tails are carefully collected by their possessors, and arranged with scrupulous order, in vast libraries under the earth, or in the caverns of the rocks, where they are preserved from accident, and handed down as the most precious heirlooms from generation to generation. By this means, no lizard knowledge is ever lost. What each lizard perceives, feels, or thinks, the sun imprints upon his epidermis in distinct characters of different kind, each character, according to its formation, belonging to the language either of thought, sensation, or perception. And in the library of Lacerta you may read the remotest history of times and events unknown to man, clearly written in this threefold tongue. The Doctor received me with all the courtesy of a superior nature. He gave me much interesting information about the Anthesphore. It is the innate instinct of these little spirits, and the sole object of all their efforts, as well as the crowning promise of their ultimate destiny, to put forth wings. The consciousness of a faculty to achieve this end is born with the flower-elf in the darkness under the earth. There, in the close blind

confine of his first clay cradle, he struggles, upheaves himself, feels about for light and air, and tries to expand—to put forth wings. With long effort he lifts himself above the earth. No sooner does he feel the air of Heaven, than again, the winged impulse quickens in his veins; and first the leaf, and then the petal, then the tender stamen, and airy pollen, attest in successive stages the rudimental results of his intense and repeated efforts to put forth the perfect wing. In the heart of the flower there is the vision and the hope of a distant paradise somewhere in the far-off summer sky, and the flower sighs forth in sweet odours its aching heart towards that unattained but promised home. But then come the ancient foes of the flower-elves, the numberless tribes of the devouring worms; and these suck dry the busy veins, and bite off the rudimental wings, and the poor flower-elf, arrested in his patient purpose, is compelled to descend again into the earth, and begin anew, under novel chances, the endless effort of an ever-baffled, never-vanquished desire. But the worms do not injure the flower-elves from mere wanton malignity, but by a defect of nature, which compels them to the wrong they do. And when it is done, they are seized with a vague remorse of their own deed, and forthwith forego their former ways, and come in penitent pilgrimage to the poor flower they have wronged; and there they build to themselves hermit-cells of repentance, wherein, after long fast, they fall in trance, and a wondrous change is wrought upon them. For the wing-bearing life of the flower, having long since passed into the body of the worm, ennobles his nature; and, reconciled thereto by this process of penitence and purification, completes in the worm the destiny of the flower; so that the crawling thing becomes at last a winged thing, which you call the butterfly. And the butterfly is born with a heart full of pity and love for the poor flower whose wings he has stolen away. So lovingly he lingers about her, so tenderly he hovers around her, that the grateful blossom takes him, with forgiving care, to her trembling bosom, and wraps him in her richest odours, and feeds him on her sweetest sweets.

"But," continued the Doctor, "the difficulty of the task you are about to undertake is far greater than you conceive. The evil and the wrong of which the lesser and humbler habitants of this world complain, have their origin less in any immitigable hostility on the part of Nature, than in the ignorance or the indifference of man. Man contains in his own all the inferior natures, and these cannot be reconciled with each other except by a previous reconciliation between the nature of man and the nature of all things whose welfare is included within his. He, then, that would reform the least of this world's wrongs must first reform this world's master—Man. Men must outlive the arrogance which is only compatible with ignorance, and learn to look with a larger loving-kindness upon all the creatures of the Infinite Love."

"Begin, then, with man. But the grown man is already out of your reach. His inner being, like his outer frame, is set and fixed beyond your power to change it. This is not the case with the child. In the hearts of children your empire may yet be established. For you are a child yourself, and your existence is an immortal childhood. Do not, then, despise your comrades of the earth. They are ready to welcome and able to love you, and it is by love that all sorrow and wrong must finally be subdued. On the heart of a child you may hope to found a universal empire over mankind. For the mother is influenced by the child, and she in turn influences the husband, the husband transmits and communicates that influence to his fellow-men by various ways, and in the consequence of all his acts, so that the influence you may secure in a child's heart, will in this way reach the state, and, through the state, affect mankind. The nursery is the parent of the state, and the whole world is but a nursery of nations."

Obedient to the counsels of *Lacerta*, and my own instincts, I have devoted myself to this endeavour, and have, by this time, succeeded in introducing myself into every nursery. I am the welcome guest of every house that is sweetened by the smile of a mother, or enlivened by the innocent laughter of childhood, whose friend and champion I have ever been. The circumstance which, as I have already informed you, first attracted me to your house, has afforded me many opportunities of becoming better acquainted with your character than you are yet aware of. Your love of children has secured to you my affection, and induces me to form the most promising opinions as to your future capacity to assist the great purpose of my existence.

It was some time after Nutcracker had finished this strange biography before I could bring myself to break by a word the charm of the silence that ensued, as he leaned back in his seat with a complacent face, and fixed upon mine a look of benevolent approbation. At length I stammered out some incoherent assurance of the pleasure I experienced in the knowledge that I had so long been honoured by the friendship of a being for whom I entertained the profoundest respect.

"This is not altogether so surprising," said he, with a mysterious smile, "for I have other grounds of interest in your family. Your cousin Theodore is one of my most intimate friends."

"Thank Heaven," I exclaimed, "then he is not dead after all?"

"Dead? who ever supposed that he *was* dead?" replied my host, with a tone of impatient surprise.

"I feared he was drowned," said I. "Where is he? Is he well? Is he happy?"

"Perfectly happy," said Nutcracker. "Instead of dragging on from day to day a jaded and useless existence at the dreary desk of a public office, or plodding step by step up the professional pulpit of learned ignorance, he is now free lord

of twenty silver lakes, and as many magnificent rivers. Instead of cramping his limbs into hideous and uncomfortable integuments of greasy cloth, he now moves swift from place to place in solemn silence, clad in shining armour, and adorned with glittering scales of orient gold, and flashing crests of ruddy metal."

"Mercy on us!" I ejaculated, "you surely don't mean to say my cousin is a fish?"

"Well, and if he *is* a fish?" cried my host, with undisguised contempt, "what then? O the arrogance of you men! Pray what do you know about fishes? and how are you sure that a man is better off than a fish? May I offer you a pinch of snuff?"

At the same time he drew from his pocket a small snuff-box made of a walnut-shell, exquisitely polished and carved; and opened it just under my nose. My nostrils, immediately filled with so pungent an odour, I was seized with a violent fit of sneezing, and clapped both my hands behind me in search of my pocket-handkerchief.

Both my pockets, however, had disappeared. The flaps of my coat were no longer the same. I could neither recognise their texture nor their form. Indignant at the trick played upon me, I was about to expostulate, when I felt myself rising with a buzzing noise in the air. This sensation would have been delicious, but for the surprise and alarm it occasioned me. My coat-flaps (when or how I know not) had changed themselves into a pair of broad brown gauzy wings. I myself—my whole being—was changed into what? Impossible to guess.

Nutcracker was looking at me with great admiration.

"For mercy's sake," I stammered out, "what am I?"

"Stay! don't fly away in such a hurry," said he, gravely inspecting me. "Turn this way. Let me look at you. What a buzzing you *do* make!"

"But what am I?" I groaned.

"Yes," he continued, talking to himself, "a remarkably fine specimen. I never saw a finer."

"A specimen!" cried I.

"And really a very interesting specimen."

"Oh, no, no!" I exclaimed, in an agony of alarm and humiliation, "do not say that. Not a specimen. Anything but a specimen."

For I thought of my poor friend Staufen-schnabel, and the dried gnaphaliuns. "For mercy's sake," I cried, losing patience, "tell me what I am, besides being a specimen."

"You are," said Nutcracker, with great solemnity, "you are . . . Yes! the metamorphose has been most successful . . . You are a magnificent male cockchafer!"

* * * * *

"Hush! you must not speak yet. You are still too weak. This is the first day the doctor declared you out of danger. If the wound had

entered half an inch nearer the left lung, it must have been fatal. Keep yourself quiet."

These were the first words I heard, when I awoke in my own bed, in my own chamber. My friends were standing around me, and whispering amongst themselves.

"How his head has been wandering," said one.

"I half fear," said another, "that his mind, poor fellow, was not quite sound for some time previous to the duel. His conduct to the chevalier was really outrageous."

"Nothing, I assure you, but love and jealousy," put in a third. "He was always a little eccentric, too. However, we cannot be too thankful on our friend's account that this unfortunate scandal has not alienated from him the friendly interest of the President."

"It has been a sad shock though, for the 'gnädige Fräulein,'" said another. "After all, it appears now, she never cared for the chevalier."

"Do not talk so loud," said a fourth. "Good Heavens! You have no idea how he has been raving—running on, without intermission, about nutcrackers, and fishes, and cockchafers, and the rats. The rats seem to have run in his head strangely; but, to be sure, the house is full of them. Then he got hold of one of little Clara's toys, too, and talked to it, as if the doll were alive. We had to put it away."

Then another friend came into the room, and sat down beside me. "Going on well, I see. How do you feel now? What a pity you could not attend the meeting of the board to-day. The question of the forest was decided by the merest majority. When you are convalescent, I am afraid you will find some of your favourite walks a good deal changed."

I made an effort to get out of bed to save the forest; but only struck my head against the old familiar walnut-chest in which I kept my clothes, and made my head giddier, though it had been giddy enough before. So they laid my head down again, and I fell asleep.

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